EVANGELIZING TO AN ABANDONED MILLENNIAL GENERATION THROUGH AN EMPOWERING FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP PREACHING SERIES

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A FINAL PROJECT SUBMITTED TO
THE DOCTORAL STUDIES COMMITTEE
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
Dayton, Ohio
May 2020

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT v

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS vi

DEDICATION viii

INTRODUCTION 1

CHAPTER

1. MINISTRY FOCUS 7

Context

Ministry Journey

Synergy

Conclusion

2. BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS 33

The Glory of the Gospel

Young Generation Suffering

Student Loan Crisis

Prison

Exegesis

Summary

3. HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS 62

Civil Rights Movement Nineteenth Century

Politics and Transformational Leaders

Social Status

Role of the Church

Summary

4. THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS 84

Black Power Movement

Black Panther Party

Black Liberation Theology

Conclusion

5. INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS 104

Generational Theory

Socioeconomics

Conclusion

6. PROJECT ANALYSIS 123

Methodology

Implementation

Summary of Learning

Conclusion

BIBLIOGRAPHY 151

ABSTRACT

EVANGELIZING TO AN ABANDONED MILLENNIAL GENERATION
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by
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United Theological Seminary, 2020

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The context is Saint Paul Baptist Church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The purpose is to attract young adults who have not been attending church. A series of practical sermons were preached that spoke to financial empowerment with biblical and theological principles. The project implementation was a six-week financial stewardship preaching series addressing the financial needs and challenges of young adults. The goal was for this approach of pragmatic preaching to attract young adults to church. This was an alternative approach to encourage young adults that Jesus is willing and able to meet them at their area of concern and needs.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Doctoral Program has been labeled as a spiritual journey. As with any journey there have been many ups and downs. The researcher has been met with unforeseen challenges, heartbreak, sickness, struggle and stress. However, the researcher has also experienced great support, success and spiritual enlightenment throughout this journey. Praises are due to the one and true living God, for surely all things have worked together for the good as a result of this process. Consequently, the first acknowledgement indeed goes to the Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ for allowing His Holy Spirit to guide the researcher to be able to complete this journey. The researcher is fully aware that without the grace of God none of this would be possible.

The researcher acknowledges his pastor and mentor, the Rev. Dr. William H. Curtis. Dr. Curtis serves as the senior pastor of the Mt. Ararat Baptist Church. He is also an alumnus of the United Theological Seminary. Through his example of pastoral and educational excellence the researcher was inspired to pursue his doctoral studies. Dr. Curtis has also cultivated a vast amount of influential relationships that the researcher was able to benefit from throughout his ministerial and educational journey. The researcher was able to leverage those relationships and connect with some incredible people who helped him along the way who the researcher acknowledges deserve recognition as well. The researcher acknowledges the Bishop Sir Walter Mack, Dr. Herbert Miller and his entire doctoral cohort and colleagues who served as a major source

of encouragement and inspiration throughout this entire process. The researcher also acknowledges the Rev. Dr. Lori D. Spears who served as sole editor for this document. She also served as a friend and encourager through this process as well.

The researcher acknowledges several clergy persons who served as a source of inspiration in ministry. The Rev. Dr. Peter DeVries, pastor of the Old Union Presbyterian Church in Mars, Pennsylvania. Dr. DeVries offered the researcher his first ministry staff opportunity during his Master of Divinity program in 2012. Dr. DeVries and Old Union have been a source of encouragement ever since. The Rev. Dr. J. Van Alfred Winsett and the Rev. Leola Cherry both serve as associate ministers at St. Paul Baptist Church. They also serve as two unique sources of wisdom and support to all aspects of ministry. The Rev. Dr. James E. Simms serves as pastor emeritus at St. Paul Baptist Church. He served St. Paul for forty years before his retirement and has been an incredible source of knowledge, support and encouragement. Lastly, but certainly not least, the researcher acknowledges the church where he is privileged to serve as senior pastor, the St. Paul Baptist Church. The researcher acknowledges that without the support, love, patience and encouragement from this loving congregation he would not have been able to make it this far.

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to the entire Tinor family. To my mother and father, Marie Lucy and Ernst Tinor, thank you for your support and love. This is also dedicated to my three older siblings, Marilyn, Tanya and Bruce Tinor, and my sister in law, Cheryl Tinor, thank you so much for always being there for me. This is also dedicated to all my nieces and nephews, Tierre, Amiya, Kiyanna, Kevin "Pop" Jr, Arianna, Elijah, Karissa and Isaiah. I love each and every one of you as if you were my own children.

The completion of this project is dedicated to bringing a sense of pride and accomplishment to the Tinor Family name. We came from humble beginnings, but we have proven that through man, things may be impossible, but through God all things are possible.

INTRODUCTION

The focus of this project is evangelizing to young adults through a preaching series aimed at speaking to the most critical and current needs millennials are facing in society. The goal is to identify and name that specific challenge that young people are facing and address it though relevant preaching. The aim of good preaching is to cause a response. The response of good preaching is to save souls, cause repentance and edify the saints. All of these goals may be accomplished through this preaching series. "We preach so that souls will be saved, so that hearts will be changed, so that behaviors will improve, so that social structures will be challenged, so that congregations will be instructed, so that communities will be formed, and so on."[1] Young adults are consumed by how they will make it day to day. However, their lives can be transformed and the communities that they live in can be uplifted through the power of concentrated preaching that speak to their present reality. Typically, most challenges they face are directly or indirectly linked to their financial condition. Young adults are either trying to find employment, trying to find better employment, trying to get out of credit card debt, student loan debt, or lastly, trying to find funding to either go to school or start a business. Young people carry these financial burdens with them every day of their lives and it seeps into every other aspect of their lives. It even effects their spirituality. Many young people are mad at God because

[1] L. Susan Bond, *Contemporary African American Preaching: Diversity in Theory and Style* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2003), 8.

they live in a state of constant struggle and survival. This mentality often times effects relationships and how they interact in society.

The aim of this project is to allow young people to understand that the financial challenges they face does not have to keep them down. Through this preaching series they can be edified practically in their situation while at the same time become introduced to a Christ who cares about their practical needs. This preaching series will also be designed to develop the necessary skills to empower young people financially. This will be a six-week preaching series designed to address, educate and equip young people to enhance their financial status in society. There will be several ways that the young people who engage in this series can be edified. They will learn how to position themselves to earn more; they will learn how to end frivolous spending. They will learn how to better their credit and eradicate debt; and lastly, they will learn how to take the excess money and invest or save for the future. The strategy behind this series will be based on the premise that an economically empowered individual is someone who can have better relationships. We want to build a community of faith who will have a better relationship with God and with one another. Therefore, this series will be a pragmatic opportunity to encourage people to do what our Lord Jesus Christ has instructed us to do. Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matt. 22:37-38). This series is aimed at building up young men and women to create better individuals, better families and ultimately a better faith community. For a man, he can have a stronger relationship with his wife and children if he is able to provide for his family. For a woman, she can have a stronger relationship

with her husband or family if she is secure in her financial status. Lastly, a person can have a stronger relationship with God once they are able to experience their needs actually being met as opposed to living in survival mode.

The goal that I expect to accomplish as a result of this study is to attract different young adults to our church context who have not been there before. I plan to use our current young adult ministry to invite their peers to the program. The expectation is that more young adults will be drawn into our church through the lure of pragmatic financial stewardship and as a result be introduced to our ministry. The ultimate goal is to introduce these young adults to Christ by reminding them through this program that God has not forgotten or abandoned them and despite the challenges that they face, this program is designed to give them the tools to be able to overcome.

The project, "Evangelizing to an Abandoned Millennial Generation Through an Empowering Financial Stewardship Preaching Series, is the result of a contextual ministry analysis and the researchers' personal journey. At the end of this project the researcher concluded that through pragmatic preaching and relevant programming young adults would be drawn back to the institution of church. There has been much discussion about the decline of the church in recent years. There have been many studies that have tried to determine the reasoning for this phenomenon. In this project, the researcher identifies the millennial generation as the most critical and poignant demographic who are missing in the modern-day church. This project was designed to identify a practical solution to reengage or "evangelize" to this specific generation in order to draw them back to the church.

In order to do that the researcher identifies a specific issue that seems to be the cause of disinterest and disengagement from this particular generation from wanting to attend church at the level of previous generations. The issue that was identified was financial stability. This project hinges on the premise that the millennial generation is struggling financially in a way that no other generation has ever struggled. As a result, the millennial generation have developed an apathy towards organized religion because the church has not addressed practical needs but instead primarily focuses on abstract spiritual matters. This millennial generation is said to be the first generation that will earn less than their parents. Millennials are also entrenched in the most student loan and credit card debt than any other generation in the history of this nation.

The goal of this project was to create a preaching series that would attract the ear of this generation by speaking to these specific challenges that they carry around in their minds and heart constantly. The preaching series was designed to speak directly to the specific financial challenges' millennials are experiencing while also offering practical solutions through biblical principles that would attempt to eradicate these challenges. This project attempted to prove whether or not this hypothesis was accurate by measuring the attitude of the young adults in the church before and after this series.

Chapter one defined the ministry context where the preaching series was implemented. The context of this project was the St. Paul Baptist Church. The researcher is the Senior Pastor of this church. The young adults (millennials) of St. Paul Baptist Church are the primary subjects of this study. Here, the reader was introduced to the rationale of this project. This chapter identified the correlation between the researcher's

personal journey and upbringing in life and in church as a millennial himself compared to the life of his context as a basis for evangelizing and growing this ministry.

Chapter two invited the reader to understand the biblical foundations that justifies the spiritual validity to this project. The reader will understand how this project is rooted in biblical, spiritual and theological principles that have guided the formation of this project. This preaching series was created with the notion that the Bible provides a spiritual and practical solution to this unique challenge that this millennial generation faces currently.

Chapter three explored a historical foundation to the methodology of evangelizing to young adults. This chapter explored the history of how other young people have responded to the challenges of their day. The precedent set by the historical black church serves as a reminder that black preaching that empowers people has been the primary instrument to encourage and attract young people to grow and evolve with confidence despite the social challenges they may have been facing.

Chapter four was built on the historical foundational precedent established by the black church and the power of black preaching which evolved to present a theological foundation. This chapter explored the black power movement in order to understand the methodology of focusing on practical social issues as well as financial and political empowerment as a way to draw young people to the movement and encourage them in their living. This chapter also explored the concept of black liberation theology proposed by scholar and theologian James Cone. This study formulated the theological premise of this projects preaching series.

Chapter five wrestled with the interdisciplinary study that undergirded this project. In this chapter, the generational theory was studied which was created by William Strauss and Neil Howe. The purpose of this study was to better understand and predict the behaviors of each generation. Every generation have certain characteristics that must be understood to be more effective at ministering to them. This chapter also explored the concept of socioeconomics as a way to create the most relevant and effective financial stewardship sermon series.

Chapter six introduced the reader to the actual project implementation. The reader was exposed to the project methodology. This chapter outlines the step-by-step process of implementing this sermon series, the details of each sermon preached and how all of the data of the research was gathered and measured. More pointedly, this chapter reviewed the results of the pre and post-test results, the finding of the focus group discussions as well as the personal interview findings of the millennials who were the tested subjects of this project. Lastly, the reader will gain insight into the researchers' reflections, summary and concluding remarks.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

The baby-boom generation is defined as the generation of children born between the years of 1940s to the mid-1960s.[1] This generation was thought to be the generation that would rebel against and redefine traditional values. I now find this theory ironic because even though this generation was projected to go against traditional values, I find that it is the Millennial Generation, the children of the baby boomers, who are now going against tradition and redefining the core American values.

One of the most fundamental and core values of our American culture is our faith practice. It is now known that the baby boomer generation did not really rebel against those traditional values. At least when you compare the Baby Boom Generation to the Millennial Generation, the Baby Boom Generation have grown up in church and participated in the Christian faith community in much higher numbers than compared to the Millennial Generation. The Baby Boom Generation have been at the forefront in the rise of the mega church boom in the early 2000's that we have seen across this country. The Baby Boom Generation has also done remarkably well financially as they benefited from a much healthier economy overall. According to author Marvin McMickle, there was a rise in the black middle class that directly benefited the Baby Boom Generation.

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[1] William Strauss and Neil Howe, *The Fourth Turning: An American Prophecy* (New York, NY: Three Rivers Press, 1997), 138.

"The number of black families earning more than $50,000 has quadrupled since 1967 and doubled in the '80s alone."[2] However, the Millennial Generation seemed to be abandoned in regard to their place in our American economy and, as a result, I believe the Millennial Generation has responded by abandoning the core values of this country, which includes being active in our faith communities.

It does not matter whether it is Roman Catholicism, Judaism, Islam or Christianity, we have always valued the opportunity to practice our faith in America and we hold that tradition to be at the pinnacle of our cultural existence in many cases. The Baby Boomer Generation actually upheld that tradition, especially in the Christian church evidenced by the rise of the megachurch coinciding with the rise of Baby Boomer church leadership. The interesting dynamic that has formed is that the children of the Baby Boomers, the Millennial Generation, has actually been the generation that has gone against traditional values and have not practiced their faith in a public traditional worship style as has been done in previous generations. I contend that the correlation to the decline of the Millennial Generation participating in formal and traditional church directly correlates to the economic decline that has crippled this particular generation. I also believe that in order to attract this lost generation and reverse the decline of the church, we will have to empower this abandoned millennial generation with entrepreneurial and organizational development skills that will enable them to compete socially and economically in a multicultural society. Therefore, I believe our churches will need to consider implementing an effective financial stewardship program in order to evangelize to the abandoned Millennial Generation.

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[2] Marvin A. McMickle, *Preaching to the Black Middle Class: Words of Challenge, Words of Hope* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2000), 10.

I was born right on the cusp and in the beginning of the Millennial Generation. In my personal life, I too have dealt with a great deal of abandonment. It started with the abandonment from my father who did not stay with my mother to raise myself and my older three siblings. That experience, unfortunately, comes with a lot of known and unknown challenges and even scars. It is obvious that a single parent home causes economic and psychological challenges, however there are also intangible and usually unrecognized challenges that go with this particular situation as well. I believe it is critically important that young black men have another, older, wiser, black man to look up to. Having that is not a luxury, it is a necessity. It is critically important for any young man, especially a young black man, to be able to have someone that he identifies with. I say especially a young black man because black people have unique and intensified challenges that are foreign to many other races and cultures. Having a successful and positive black male figure will help aid in shaping his identity and also give him hope and guidance for his future.

The Bible declares, "Where there is no vision, the people perish."[3] A man without a vision of someone who looks like him, acts like him, talks like him and engages society in a similar fashion as he, will be vulnerable of not reaching his full potential simply because he did not have the proper vision on how to proceed and succeed in life. I have been fortunate that I was able to have an older brother, an older cousin (who was as close as a brother), and older mentors, such as my football coaches, who helped to supplement my need for a strong black male mentor and leader in my life. However, I do not discount

[3] Proverbs 29:18, New International Version. Biblical citations in this document are from the NIV unless otherwise stated.

the negative effect the abandonment of my biological father has had on my life both psychologically and even financially.

Now, as a young millennial pastor, I have the privilege to be included in fellowship and conversations with older leaders and pastors and I find it interesting that one of the main questions that seems to come up in some shape or form is, "how are we going to get millennials to go to church?" I cannot tell you how many times I had to hear this question, or have been asked this question, or have been asked to address this question in the form of a seminar or sermon. The truth is I do not know if anyone truly has the exact "right" answer to this question. The problem is that right now the church as a whole is not addressing, understanding or meeting their needs. "Millennials also are widely predicted to become the first generation in U.S. history to do worse than their parents financially."[4] The millennial generation are not only struggling financially but in other areas of society as well. This generation is struggling with the concept of gender identity and sexuality in profound way. Millennials are not looking for more information in church because they grew up with the internet and often times they know more in the pew than what is coming from the pulpit. In contrast, however this generation has a deep desire for mentorship due to so many young people growing up with a single parent household. My belief is that if and when the church decides to address fundamental basic needs of this abandoned generation, then this particular generation will be open to listening to anyone who is willing and able to meet and reach their needs. The church has an incredible opportunity to evangelize to this generation of unchurched millennials by

[4] Dave Roos, "Are Millennials Really the First Generation to do Worse than Their Parents?" How Stuff Works, accessed April 30, 2019, https://money.howstuffworks.com/personal-finance/financial-planning/millennials-first-worse-parents.htm.

using the attraction of inclusion and mentorship. One practical way to guide that mentorship is to offer economic empowerment through the practice of entrepreneurial development and organizational leadership. This younger generation has a deep craving to be led out of the challenges that they inherited, often times by no fault of their own and they are just looking for someone to understand and address it.

I believe there are practical and spiritual ramifications to the decline of economy specific to the middle class. For the past several decades the wealth gap has widened to such a margin that the millennial generation has been crushed by the most consumer and student loan debt that any generation has faced in our nation's history. Not being able to get out of debt, or to get a job, or to buy a house and a car will not only effect families, which will in turn effect communities, but my argument is that it will affect how one perceives their relationship with God. Millennials have a deep spiritual yearning; however, they do not look at the church as the outlet or vehicle to quench that thirst. Millennials will now meet in small groups, go to coffee shops or even stay home and search the internet to shop for any spiritual convenient message that will give them the jolt they need at that particular time. This concerns me because while as a millennial I understand the frustration, I also see the danger in being disconnected to a spiritually healthy community. There is a lot of danger and risk to being raised in a tribal and individualistic community where there are no checks and balances. One risk that may arise is that whatever one person may perceive to be right will be deemed right because there is no central spiritual authority. This is why I believe there is value in being a part of a faith community. I also believe that there is value in having fellowship with other believers as well as a formal practice of communal worship and the study of God's word.

I am writing this chapter as a means to address and reevaluate some of the failed attempts by the church to include a generation who has actually become the generation to redefine and resist the traditional values that we have come to take for granted in this country. Further, I believe we need to evangelize to this generation in a non-traditional way, for example, attempting to meet their socioeconomic needs with program specifically designed to address their personal challenges and then use those programming opportunities as a gateway to introduce them to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Millennials are not necessarily looking for tradition, but they are not necessarily opposed to it either. What is more important to them is that they want their fundamental and basic needs to be met and I believe that this proposed theory has a precedence in scripture because just as our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ, fed the multitude of people before he preached to them the truth of the gospel, I believe that the church can create practical programming that will meet people at the area of their specific needs in order to gain their attention and ready their hearts to receive the gospel message of Jesus Christ.

One of the most challenging things to do is to try and compete in the socio-economic climate without the proper skills or being denied proper access. One thing that I have learned is that a lot of young adults have the work ethic and drive to be successful in life. Whether that pertains to their relationships, their careers, their families, they want to be successful, but the problem is they do not have the necessary skills and or information on how to reach a certain level of success. This can be for a variety of reasons, for example, not having the proper parental guidance at home or not having mentors who are able or willing to provide the necessary leadership to prepare them for

proper success. Often times this form of abandonment will be misconstrued as a lack of effort or having a bad attitude towards life when in fact they were never properly trained. The reason this is relevant is because this phenomenon has a direct correlation to one's faith journey. This notion of feeling abandoned or left out or not included creates a resentment and a rebellion for life and bleeds into a person having a resentment for God. However, on the other hand, one of the most Christian things someone can do is offer a person an invitation or an opportunity to have a safe place to develop, grow and learn how to be the best version of their future self.

Many young people are failing in relationships not necessarily because they have grown so apathetic towards having a relationship but because I believe they do not have the necessary relationship skills to be able to handle the challenges and responsibility of being so close and depended on by someone else. Those lack of relationship skills are not limited to romance but are also very prevalent in the work place as well. The same phenomenon can be seen in other areas of a young person's life as well. Many young people do not have the discipline to be able to handle a stable corporate structured job because they do not possess the relationship skills necessary to be able to submit to authority or work as a team to achieve a common and lofty goal. That leads to missed economic opportunity which can then ultimately lead to premature entrepreneurial attempts which are birthed from desperation and not from divine and creative influence. Those same lack of skills that could have been developed in the corporate setting will create challenges and can lead to failure when someone expected to be taken on the responsibility of running their own company. I believe young people who experience this

unfortunate cycle of economic frustration interpret it as a curse from God and fall further away from the faith.

Many young people deal with this challenge of not being able to handle, or not wanting to have a traditional corporate job while due to the lack of discipline and structure it takes to keep or thrive in that environment. The problem is they will still need to make a living and if they do not have the discipline or skills to keep a corporate or traditional job than one can assume they may not have the necessary skills to be able to become an effective entrepreneur or business owner as well. Anyone can start a business but not everyone will be ready to handle the challenges or absorb the risk and responsibility it takes to be a successful entrepreneur. The unfortunate reality is that even though I acknowledge that this challenge effects people of all ages, races and cultures, this challenge effects the African American community in a disproportionate way. It becomes very challenging to keep gainful employment without the proper skills, education and mentorship. Without proper employment, it becomes very challenging to sustain healthy relationships, especially romantic relationships, and it also become extremely difficult to raise healthy children. We should all agree that every person deserves an opportunity to be able to enjoy the benefits of being in a healthy romantic relationship and have the opportunity to have children and raise a family. However, when someone has not been properly prepared to handle those responsibilities it can affect every aspect of their life, even their faith journey and perception of God. Many of these challenges leave African American young people not motivated to go to church especially when they do not believe the church is addressing these issues head on. Millennials believe church is a place that focuses more on tradition than addressing

needs. Church practices more shouting and singing than addressing social and economic and political issues. I would argue that the church would be more attractive to young people if the church would first name these issues and then be willing to address these issues by developing programming and building relationships in the community that will offer economic empowerment and leadership training that will allow young black men and women to not only survive but thrive in an ever changing, multicultural environment.

Context

"Once America's steel town, the city [Pittsburgh] is now a hub for Google, Amazon and Uber. This is great news for a city that was feeling some of the strain so many Rust Belt cities have suffered under the past few years. But it was terrible news for people living in neighborhoods like East Liberty, a place that was once a black neighborhood."[5] Pittsburgh, like many urban communities around the country, had to deal with the challenge of gentrification. Gentrification is known as the process of transforming low value neighborhoods to high value neighborhoods. Unfortunately, this process will oftentimes displace many long-time standing residents by creating higher prices for rent, mortgages and property taxes. "Pittsburgh used to be a premier industrial town. According to a report from Carnegie Mellon University's Institute for Complex Engineered Systems, steel mills laid off 153,000 workers following the 1981-82 depression."[6] The closing down of many mills here in Pittsburgh changed the entire

[5] Andy Sheehan, "Some Older Lawrenceville Residents not Happy with Reurbanization," Pittsburgh CBS Local, accessed November 17, 2017, http://pittsburgh.cbslocal.com/2013/11/14/some-older-lawrenceville-residents-not-happy-with-re-urbanization/.

[6] Brett Wilson, "Neighborhoods in Transition: Gentrification Hits Pittsburgh," Pitt News, accessed November 17, 2017, https://pittnews.com/article/3509/news/neighborhoods-in-transition-gentrification-hits-pittsburgh/.

landscape of the city. It affected everything from the economy to the cultural identity. However, at the turn of the century there was an effort to reinvest into the city. That effort caused the creation of new looking neighborhoods.

Gone were many of the historic cultural sites and environments that represented a specific demographic of people, instead now we have neighborhoods, specifically on the East End, that include people from all cultures, races and many who do not have a specific claim to Pittsburgh or western Pennsylvania at all. They have come from all over the world to live and work and the question becomes how do we minister to people who are not from the area, may not have a connection to the city, the neighborhood and or the history, and they may be transient and only here for a few years? I believe to have an effective ministry in a post-modern generation we will need to be able to hold true to our own historical values and beliefs while at the same time we need to be able to address the needs of the people who are in and around our current context in order to stay relevant. Otherwise we are threatened to become extinct as we watch the world move on all around us, without us.

Multiculturalism is a very important concept that we need to be mindful of when preparing to do ministry in a post-modern generation. Our church context used to be located in the historically African American neighborhood known as Garfield. The majority of our membership is from Garfield; however, we also have members who live and work in many of the surrounding neighborhoods of where our church is currently located which is the Point Breeze section of the city. Our church now sits on a very busy corner at the intersection of Fifth Avenue and Penn Avenue. According to Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, the corner of Fifth Avenue and Penn Avenue is one the

most trafficked intersections in the entire city. This explains why the city reinvested millions of dollars to upgrade this particular East End section of the city. Even being called "East End" is a type of rebranding because the East End is just comprised of several neighborhoods such as Garfield, Point Breeze, Homewood, Wilkinsburg, and East Liberty, just to name a few. "The church was once the center of a community of persons who lived within that immediate neighborhood. It has increasingly become a place where most of the members travel from considerable distances to meet together once a week for a couple of hours and then leave, with little or no contact with the people who actually live in the community."[7] The church will need to speak to the changing landscape and environment that is happening in our communities. I am convinced, however, that while our communities may be changing, the power of the preached word is timeless. Therefore, in order for the church to sustain and have longevity there will need to be a preacher who can stand as prophet and proclaim the good news of the gospel to all people in the midst of a changing societal landscape. Young people will draw towards that approach and method.

St. Paul Baptist Church moved to our new church building in 1997 and this building is where we worship now in the Point Breeze section of the city. It was about a decade or so after that move that people could really start seeing and feeling the effects of the gentrification efforts. There are brand new housing and apartment developments, new parks, new shopping centers, big time corporations such as Whole Foods, Google, Uber, Amazon, Marriott Hotel and the list goes on. While the new upgrades have no doubt revitalized the East End section of the city, it has come with a cost. Most people have

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[7] McMickle, *Preaching to the Black Middle Class*, 2.

been affected by this gentrification, but black people in particular have especially felt the effects because they have been at a greater jeopardy of losing their housing and not being able to afford to live in their own neighborhood due to higher prices. Black people have also had to deal with the challenge of not being able to find jobs or even getting an opportunity to work at the new companies who just moved into the neighborhoods.

This is all relevant because as I look at my current context what I realize is that there is a major void in my church in particular. My church has a congregation of people who are fifty years old and above and the rest of the demographic are in high school or younger. I came into a church who are missing an entire demographic of people from the ages eighteen to forty years old, otherwise known as the Millennial Generation. The one thing I am convinced about, however, is that the missing demographic is alive and well and all around the neighborhoods. They are actively engaged in and around the city, however they are not active in church, especially at St. Paul Baptist Church. The older members all have kids and grandkids in that demographic. The youth of our church all have mothers, fathers and older siblings. The problem is that this missing demographic, this lost Millennial Generation, have made the conscious decision to not participate in church and I believe they made that decision because they do not believe that church will address their needs. They believe in God, they have a spiritual pulse, they are, however, struggling to survive in a world that they feel may have forgotten about or even abandoned them.

An example of the world abandoning the millennial generation can be the laws that favor the rich and punish the poor. There are predatory lending laws that allow banks and other institutions to target and take advantage of younger people who do not have the

resources to meet their basic needs. The prices for goods and services have continued to increase, however the minimum work wages in general for most jobs have stayed stagnant. As a result, most millennials have put their primal human survival over spiritual connectedness. Especially if they are having trouble properly connecting how the two may be interrelated. I believe as a church we can do a better job of meeting this generation of people at their level of need where we of course give them a spiritual outlet to worship and study the word of God. However, at the same time we need to provide programming that offer practical skills, mentorship and discipleship that will help them grow in their personal lives, have stronger families and allow them to compete in the multicultural society that they cannot escape from.

Ministry Journey

As an African American millennial, I can certainly relate to the discouragement of trying to thrive in world that seems determined to leave you out. There is a horrible reality in this country which has proven that our justice system that has consistently treated black people disproportionately worse than our white counterpart, and it is heartbreaking. The fact that young black men have been systematically funneled into the prison system, often times for non-violent, petty, drug related crimes, making it that much more difficult for them to be able to function properly or advance economically in society. Further, when these young black men get out of jail, many times after an unjust extended period of time compared to the crime they were convicted of, they will not be able to acclimate themselves with society due to a lack of education, support or resources. One out of three men who get released from prison end up going back within a year.

Typically, because they do not have the support necessary to provide for themselves, let alone their families. I believe this translates to a generation of young black people who have a lot of passion regarding these issues, for example the #BLACKLIVESMATTER Movement, is because they have so deeply and personally been affected by it. The Black Lives Matter Movement is an international activist movement that campaigns against violence and systematic racism towards black people.

Many people in this generation of young black millennials have personally been affected by the abandonment of being included in the laws and culture of this society. For example, many young people had to absorb the effects of a single parent home mostly because that parent was lost to the criminal justice system which has caused them a lot of pain and a huge emotional void or they have been absent because of the fear of not being financially able to take on the responsibility of raising a family. This phenomenon can make it almost impossible to thrive in a society that controls the economic and social standards and demands that a black man or woman to adapt to a different set of values or structures than we grew up in, and often times it is extremely challenging to make that adjustment.

I grew up in a multicultural environment. I had the pleasure of living in various environments such as New York City, where I was born to Ft. Lauderdale, Florida for a brief time when my mother and stepfather divorced. I spent the most of my time in the Lehigh Valley area in a city called Allentown, Pennsylvania, which was where I grew up. I spent most of my adolescent years growing up however in the neighboring, small town called Whitehall, Pennsylvania. I went to three different high schools because of my family's constant movement. While that is not an ideal situation for any adolescent, I was

fortunate to be able to get a broader perspective on life as well as see first-hand how dramatically different some people grow up compared to others. Even the disparity in upbringing from a child growing up in Allentown, Pennsylvania to a child growing up in Whitehall, Pennsylvania, two towns that are walking distances away from each other, can be surprising. I lived in both areas and am speaking from personal experience.

There were so many cultural and educational differences in the three high schools I attended growing up that it is actually difficult to articulate. The high school I went to in Lauderdale Lakes, Florida, Boyd Anderson High School, had a world of difference compared to William Allen High School in Allentown, Pennsylvania. Both of those high schools were different compared to the high school where I spent the most of my time and that was Whitehall High School. For example, Boyd Anderson High was an African American School that was phenomenal in athletics, however, was not as up to par regarding academics. William Allen High School in Allentown was Hispanic with a small African American and Caucasian presence that was in the middle both athletically and academically in their region. Whitehall High School, the school I graduated from and spent three years of high school and the majority of my middle school and elementary school years, was a Caucasian school located in a small town with excellent academics and above average good athletics despite being a smaller school.

Beyond the athletic and academic comparison, my biggest take away from attending different schools were the cultural differences. Each school had their own unique advantages, and each school would have been a great place for me to graduate. The key take-away was that my social life and cultural experiences could not have been more different from each other. Down in Florida the precedence was placed on athletics

for sure. In Allentown, Pennsylvania, I remember having a different experience, there not as much emphasis placed on athletics but there were a lot of other cultural differences mainly because they had such a different racial demographic and obviously was located in a different region of the country. Both of those experiences were extremely different from Whitehall High School and while my focus is not to pit one high school experience above or beneath another, especially since there are so many variable factors, my point is that I have come to realize that each high school experience can uniquely prepare someone to prosper in certain environments above some of their peers who may not have been able to receive the same experiences.

Education has an enormous effect on each of our personal and social development. This development effects earning potential and can go a long way in determining one's social status. What I realized through my personal educational journey is that having the opportunity to go to college confirmed what I learned during my high school years and that is: where a person grows up and how they grow up has a huge effect on their ability to succeed and thrive in certain environments. I also realized that if someone did not go to college then their high school experience plays an even bigger role in their social and personal development. What I have learned is that many people in our communities, whether they go to church or do not go to church, are a product of their environment and upbringing, meaning, some people are more prepared and equipped than others to be able to thrive in these new gentrified communities that are developing all over the country, even here in the East End of Pittsburgh. The sad reality is, however, that many people, particularly young adults, are having challenges trying to find a place to compete in a regional or global marketplace and economy because they have been

brought up to thrive in one particular culture or with one particular community of people. That can be deemed problematic when a neighborhood changes and they are unable to change and adapt with it. Whether they realize it or not there can be language barriers (even if everyone is speaking English), communication challenges, dress attire differences, value systems and the list can go on and on to why some people in our gentrified areas are having trouble thriving in their very own neighborhoods.

Due to my diverse upbringing, I sometimes take for granted my ability to adapt to many different environments. I have learned the value of being able to understand that certain cultural norms can actually be viewed as abnormal in another environment. To be clear, I am not at all suggesting that I think that one culture is superior than another or one race of people is better or worse than another. I am suggesting that I understand that different people will have experienced drastically different upbringings based on their neighborhoods, schooling and culture. That reality may positively or negatively affect how they compete in the marketplace and in society. I have come to realize that many people in these underserved neighborhoods have all the talent and the ambition in the world but sometimes lack the proper opportunity, skills and mentoring necessary for them to succeed when they are finally exposed to a different environment. The bigger challenge is that most of the times many people will not realize that they do not have the necessary resources or skills to compete and do better for themselves until it is too late, simply because they have not been exposed to what other people in other neighborhoods or schools have been exposed to.

For example, we had a pretty good football team at Whitehall High School. We won nine games and only lost two games my senior year in our region and we went to the

playoffs. However, one of the points I often tried to get across to my teammates at Whitehall High School was that even though we are good in Pennsylvania, we might not have won a game if we were playing high schools down in Florida. The only reason I was able to make that statement was because I was exposed to Boyd Anderson High School in Fort Lauderdale, Florida and I knew that there was a distinct difference to how we approached athletics and the caliber that they had in Florida compared to the type of athlete we had in Whitehall, Pennsylvania. That same premise is true when it comes to economic advancement and social development. These gentrified neighborhoods have forced a lot of people out and they are not letting them back in not only due to the economic disparity but also because many people do not realize that they do not have the resources and skills, comparatively speaking, to compete in the job market compared the people who are moving in and working at the new companies in the neighborhood which would enable them to afford the higher prices of rent of the new housing which are being developed in these same neighborhoods.

Synergy

I believe the church can serve as a place to address the needs of the people, specifically in the generation of young adults, millennials, who have not been as active in church as previous generations. If we, as the church, are truly able to meet one of the fundamental needs, such as not abandoning this lost generation but instead ensuring that their voices are heard, and their needs are addressed, I believe we can win over a generation of people. We should aim to offer practical programming which would encourage personal economic growth and if we are able to do that I believe that church

will be much more attractive to an entire generation of people and in turn open their minds and hearts to receive the core message of the church which is the good news that Jesus Christ saves. One practical way of attempting to meet this fundamental need of a generation of people, specifically African American young adults, is to focus the newly proposed church programming to teach the proper skills pertaining to organization building and entrepreneurship. This should be a two-part approach that would provide programming that is focused on offering practical skills and opportunities inside of the church, but there should also be the incorporation of offering practical leadership training and organizational opportunities outside of the church as well.

The church should offer young people opportunities inside of the church that will engage them and challenge them to run their own ministry or to have an opportunity to be on staff. The church should also bridge the gap with the community and broker deals with the corporations around the neighborhood that will grant opportunities to members of the church who are willing to go through training that can be offered at the church but will allow an opportunity to get hired by a company once they completed the necessary training that the church provided. This will only happen by church leadership stepping outside of the four walls of the church and building relationships with the business communities around the neighborhood with the aim of several goals in mind.

This may be a different approach to evangelism however it has the potential to provide a high reward. The goal is to build tangible and practical relationships with the community. We know that some of these companies need to have a diverse pool of people who they can recruit from to be able to build their organization. We as the church could work out an agreement to train capable candidates, through the involvement of the

church, to be able to fill some of their internship and or employment needs. In order to accomplish this goal, we would have to be realistic about the skills and needs that a particular company has so that we can create programming that will properly address and train in those particular areas. Then, on our side we would have to determine if they would be willing to put their money where their mouth is and invest and or partner in these programming initiatives. The draw would be that corporation would be willing to reinvest in the neighborhood in which they reside, but it also will ensure that they have a reliable recruiting base in which to tap into when they need to fill a position.

After obtaining my business degree from the University of Pittsburgh, and before I was called into full time ministry, I was fortunate enough to have worked in several Fortune 500 companies. I have worked at JP Morgan Chase Bank as my first job after college. I then worked for Enterprise Rent-A-Car as a Branch Manager. I then worked in sales for seven years for two of the top payroll companies in America, an area sales representative for Paychex and a district manager for ADP, Inc. There are so many lessons I have learned about working in corporate America for so many years. Several of those lessons I have learned throughout the years are very much applicable to many areas of ministry as well as this project I will create. One of the lessons is that even though these companies are huge Fortune 500 companies, they all seem to operate as a bunch of smaller departments that report to a bigger department which reports to a bigger department and so on. That is why most companies have a model where there is a district or regional manager, and then that manager reports to that district or regional manager, and that district or regional manager reports to a vice president, and lastly that vice president report to a senior executive. That is a pretty common organizational flow and

that model, or some variation of that model can be taught to young people who may not be familiar or exposed to how to run an organization. We can also teach them to how to fit in and advance within an organizational flow chart along with exposing them to the different responsibilities that come with the different positions. The point I am making is that the church can become a place where organizational development and training can take place.

The most impactful part of my ministry journey was hearing the preached word in my life. Even though I grew up in a diverse environment, it was the power of the preached word in the African American context that really spoke to me and changed my life. Hearing the dynamic sermons of Dr. Curtis at the Mt. Ararat Baptist Church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania during my formative years of college really helped to shape my spiritual life as well as my understanding of Gods call for my life and what I wanted to do with my life. It was during those years that I developed the inspiration and the confidence that I could do great things and become a great leader in the community. My mental vision for my life was shaped during those formative years and it was through the impact of the preached word. "Regardless of the diversity within either African American or white homiletic approaches, the reigning paradigms tend to favor either an individualistic model (personal piety) or an institutional maintenance model."[8] While I was already saved and baptized by the time I came to Pittsburgh as a college student, it was the unique style of preaching that I received at Mt. Ararat Baptist Church that really spoke to me individually. It was during that time and through those powerful sermons, week in and week out that I was unequivocal in my belief that I could accomplish great things in

[8] Bond, *Contemporary African American Preaching*, 18.

my life, despite the abandonment I had to endure during my adolescent years. I still believe that the power of preaching is timeless, and it is still able to touch and transform lives. It can transform lives spiritually and practically as well.

With all of that being said, my plan for this project is to develop a non-profit organization that is in conjunction with our church to serve as a training facility. We will use the church facility and classrooms as a training ground. We will go out and develop relationships with local business and corporations to invest in our programming with the goal of partnering and using our graduates as candidates to fill certain roles and positions they may have openings for. My target market will be for young adults (millennials) who are looking for an opportunity to learn how to become an entrepreneur, develop organization creation and or general leadership and or relationship skills. We will have to make sure that we develop strong relationships throughout the business and political communities so that we can make sure that our goals are clearly defined while at the same time we do a great job in preparing a diverse pool of people who can earn opportunities to become a valuable part of a successful organization. For example, we will need to know the companies who are willing to hire or develop ex-offenders. We will need to know what positions are available in the community, which requires a high school diploma, GED, college degree, and or post-secondary degree. The strength of these programming will be based on the strength of our relationships with these companies. The more we know about their needs and create a demand to have a diverse pool of candidates to help with their organizational goals, that will allow us to help develop the people in our community who may seem left out and are looking for an

opportunity to be able to compete successfully in a multicultural, technological economic climate.

In conjunction with those goals outside of the church, it was through the power of the preached word that has been deposited in my spirit where I adopted the belief that I am also able to create opportunities within the church to offer opportunities for millennials to lead their own ministry as an attempt of foster organizational development training. Leading a ministry would not only help with the vision of the pastor in leading the church in the direction that the Lord is calling, but it will also create ownership and buy in for the young generation to be acknowledged, heard and developed in an area of interest while at the same time encouraging their spirituality.

Conclusion

The power of the preached word deposited a seed into my spirit that grew into an unwavering belief that God can use me to be a great leader in my church and community. The goal is to use the same means of preaching to inspire other young people that despite the abandonment that they had to deal with in their lives they are still able to live past it and accomplish amazing things in their own lives and for the communities they live in. Preaching can be used as an evangelistic tool to fill the church house with the desired target market of the young adult, Millennial Generation, who I believe have been abandoned. I believe that the most effective form of evangelism and discipleship is through direct mentorship and personal training. We need young people brought into the ministry where they can get personal guidance and direction both spiritually and

professionally, while at the same time receiving practical skills, training and real-world opportunities.

Preaching can be used also as a pragmatic influence to lead and guide young people to gain and develop the skills needed to be able to be productive in the workplace which would encourage personal economic growth. Not only do we want a community of young adult African American who are spiritually encouraged along with gaining practical work skills, but we want to encourage an entrepreneurial spirit that will allow young people to be creative and to be able to build businesses and organizations so that they will be able to one day operate emotionally, mentally, spiritually and economically, rather than a position of reliance and weakness. Being empowered politically and economically will also allow these same young adults to change and dictate the cultural climate. Ideally, while we develop these young leaders, they will in turn be able to support the church that invested in them and then they will engage society as leaders in the business and political community with the desire to lead with a spiritual influence. This can be initiated by the seed of the word that is preached to these young adults on a persistent and consistent basis.

Not only do I plan to have preaching be the central tool that evangelizes and inspires young adults in our community, but I also plan to create and atmosphere and culture where we will all have an opportunity to respond to the preached word in a practical manor. I plan to do research surrounding the millennial demographic along with the surrounding business community. The purpose of my research is to figure out why this Millennial Generation do not have a desire to come to church. I want to explore what factors play a part in the decline in church attendance in this particular age group. My

plan is to create surveys, host conferences, do test training events and seminars all in an attempt to prove or disprove the theories I have discussed in this chapter. For example, is there is a correlation between the economic climate and the decline in the church attendance specific to millennials? Is economic empowerment, entrepreneurial development and leadership training an enticing draw for millennials to reengage with the church? Is the gentrification challenge that has happened in the community racially motivated? If so, are local governments and businesses willing to invest and engage in our churches community programming to continue to develop the neighborhoods in order to include those who have been displaced? Is there a correlation between racism and classism, and which one take precedence? How does spirituality and theology play a role in the mind of millennials regarding their economic and social position in their lives?

The way to connect all of these aspirations via the church is by having a powerful and inspirational preaching ministry. Preaching is the lifeblood of the black church. Through the power of the preached word we can spread the gospel message of Jesus Christ in hopes to save souls. However, the preached word can also have an impact on encouraging, lifting up, articulating vision and setting the tone or atmosphere of what God is calling that particular church to do. The main reason I have come to place in my life and ministry journey that I have is through the power of the preached word in my life. The preached word has taken root in my life and has given me the inspiration and belief that I can have a positive future and do great things in my life. "'The aim and purpose of the sermon is to educate, edify, and enrich people in the faith.' Sermons are supposed to be faith building, or faith-forming, particularly as moments where Christian truth meets

the spiritual needs of sinners by bringing them into the presence of grace."[9] The power of the preached word inspired faith in me and I believe the power of the preached word still has the ability to inspire and draw the sinner into the church and create leaders and better people from them both spiritually and as members in our society.

[9] Bond, *Contemporary African American Preaching,* 70.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

The financial and societal challenges that young adults experience today has affected their outlook on the church experience. The goal of this project is to remind young adults that the word of God speaks to their pain and offers solutions. Therefore, a return to church would benefit their life as opposed to being a hinderance. The biblical foundation of this project with the goal to implement an effective financial stewardship program in order to evangelize to the abandoned millennial generation, will include the study of the biblical text, Second Corinthians 4:9. This text was chosen for the examination of the challenge that the millennial generation faces when competing socially and economically in our culture. There is also a challenge that church currently faces in being able to attract this generation to be present in church, involved in activities and engaged in the faith. This text will also serve as a biblical foundational guide as to the way we can attempt to properly diagnose and solve this challenge by using practical solutions rooted in biblical principles. In this biblical study, there will be scriptural analysis coupled with the works and writings of biblical scholars and theologians who have studied this passage which has been presented.

The Bible can be used an authoritative measure on how to properly diagnose a problem. This very same Bible can also be used to provide a proper prescription as a means of resolution to the problem that has been suggested. Second Timothy 3:16-17

states, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." My goal is to analyze this passage of Second Corinthians 4:9, as a means to diagnose a problem we are currently facing regarding this millennial generation being actively involved in the church. This scripture will be used as a basis to point to potential solutions and strategies to help properly address these challenges from a biblical perspective.

In his earlier letter to the Corinthian Church, Paul compared himself and his fellow apostles to "men condemned to die in the arena" (1 Cor. 4:9). The metaphor Paul used can be compared similarly to the imagery that is used to describe the demands of the ministry. There are several dichotomies in ministry that we have to deal with in order to grow the church, not just in numbers but in spiritual maturity. There must be a reverence and respect of the older generation. That generation has upheld the traditions of the church, they have been through social and economic challenges and have proven to have the ability to persevere; and they are the generation that has wisdom and knowledge that can be passed down. However, on the other side to that equation is there needs to be similar reverence and respect for the upcoming or younger generation.

Every upcoming generation represents the future. They are the future leaders; they are the future movers of the church. They have the energy to uplift and advance the traditions of the church and they will have the platform to dictate whether or not the church will be able to move forward. However, there seems to be a great generational divide in the church which is causing the absence of the young generation to be attentive and engaged in the current progress of the church. In this text Paul is attempting to

compare and contrast the helplessness of the human condition with divine intervention. This contrast can include both psychological and physical suffering. The reason this particular text was chosen is because it speaks to the contradicting dichotomies that are evident in the church. Young adults who have chosen not to attend church are dealing with both psychological and physical suffering. The church needs to be able to name those afflictions and attempt to meet those needs in order to bridge the gap and the void left by the millennial generation in the church.

How does one reconcile the abandonment they have experienced during their adolescence? According to Claudia Black, Ph.D., "Shame arises from the painful message implied in abandonment: 'You are not important. You are not of value.' This is the pain from which people need to heal."[1] That is the question facing many people of this current millennial generation. This millennial generation has been abandoned, not only by society and culture, but also by the church. Many churches continue to foster an archaic approach to ministry which often times sends the message that young people are not welcome. There is a prevailing notion that the millennial generation may be welcome to attend worship services, but often times they are not as welcome to serve in leadership, their voices are not readily heard or respected, and the issues that they are currently facing in their lives are not being actively addressed. Of course, there are many youth programs in churches attempting to address certain issues, however, this millennial generation is mostly comprised of young adults now. They are currently from the ages of twenty-one to thirty-five and they are dealing with young adult issues that are in many

[1] Claudia Black, "Understanding the Pain of Abandonment Psychology Today," accessed April 30, 2019, https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-many-faces-addiction/201006/understanding-the-pain-abandonment.

ways different than the issues the previous generation had to deal with based on an ever-changing society. The church communal, particularly the black church, used to serve as the central point of influence as well as social, emotional and spiritual encouragement for the community.

Unfortunately, the church has now been relegated as just another option to many young people. Young people are either creating their own solutions to try and deal with the challenges they face in their lives, or they are relying on other organizations and or programs to participate in. Often times, the church is not a very attractive option because there seems to be a unique disconnection between the church and this generation due to the fast-paced changing world that the previous generation is not responding to quick enough. We live in a technological age that millennials are growing up in, but the church is not readily embracing. The author is convinced that one way the church can evangelize to the missing generation is through the power of the preached word. If the church can structure a gospel message that is tailored to speak to the pain that this generation is dealing with along with speaking to the hope of the future, then the church would become a much more attractive option. "Preaching proclaims the gospel or the good news of God's kingdom hopes for social transformation."[2] The preacher should never be afraid to proclaim the truth of the gospel in an attempt to speak to pain and cause social change.

The Apostle Paul was not afraid to address the issues that were facing the Corinthian church in those times. How does the Apostle Paul address the issue of abandonment and rejection? In these verses the apostle gives an account of their courage and patience under all their sufferings. The theme of the entire book of Second

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[2] L. Susan Bond, *Contemporary African American Preaching: Diversity in Theory and Style* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2003), 86.

Corinthians is suffering. Paul uses the theme of suffering and sacrifice as a reference to point out the glory gospel. His argument is that the gospel is glorious enough and worthy enough to endure the present suffering of this world. Paul also argues that even through our present sufferings God is still able to use us in powerful ways for his greater good. Paul often speaks about the glory of the gospel. The glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ transcends all other truth. The gospel of Jesus Christ is that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world. Anyone who believes in Jesus Christ and the power of his resurrection, even though they have sinned, is able to receive salvation by the grace of God. The receipt of salvation is exponentially worthier and more desirable the temporary pain and suffering we may have to endure to be able to spread that gospel message. So, while the Apostle Paul pours out his heart in this epistle, we can surmise that Paul allows himself to endure all the suffering is due to the glory of the gospel.

Paul understood and believed in the absolute power of the gospel truth of Jesus Christ. There was nothing that man could add or subtract from the gospel. The gospel truth stood alone in its authority, and that authority had the power to redeem and save the lost soul. The gospel message can only be accepted or rejected. Man does not have the authority to tamper with it in any way. Paul obviously accepted the gospel message as authority and spent his entire life preaching and evangelizing its message. It was that glorious power of this redemption message that enabled Paul to stand and be able to endure the tribulations of his life. Paul became a martyr for preaching the gospel message and he did so because he placed the glory of the gospel as the highest standard of ethics and authority in his life. Therefore, Paul viewed his own personal life through the lens and perspective of this glorious gospel.

When we look at the life of the Apostle Paul, we see a life of extreme suffering. Paul was shipwrecked, jailed, beaten and suffered many trials and tribulations. He was often taken to the brink of death. Paul, however, endured it all for in order to continue to uplift the gospel of Jesus Christ. God often delivered him from the horrendous dangers of death. Even at the end of his life, Paul proclaims that "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7). How was Paul able to do all of this? Paul was able to endure this all because Paul understood and valued the glory of the gospel. Paul even defends the authenticity of his call to the gospel based on how many trials and tribulations he went through. Paul talked about the way he was treated and what he had to endure as a way to authenticate his servanthood to Christ. He validated his apostleship based on his imprisonments: thirty-nine lashes, the way the Romans beat him with rods, the way he was stoned, shipwrecked and robbed. Paul testifies that he had to journey among false brothers, he dealt with extreme hunger and thirst, he spent time in extreme weather conditions and on top of that he usually had daily worries for the church. He says all of those things not to boost himself up but instead to relate to those who may be facing troubles and hardships. His central argument is that throughout all those trials it is well worth it in order to spread the gospel message of Jesus Christ. His suffering was necessary in order to invite others to believe in the salvation power of God.

The Glory of the Gospel

There are several points of emphasis that needs to be pointed out about Paul's personal perspective of his own life that will lay the foundation of understanding for this letter that he wrote to the Corinthian church. First, we must understand that Paul was an

extreme legalist who murdered Christians on account of the Law. "As for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless." (Phil. 3:6) Paul was a proud believer in the law and his right to defend the law. However, he was totally transformed on the road to Damascus when he was struck down by the blinding light of Jesus Christ. That light was symbolic of the gospel light that was shone in his heart. That transformative experience allowed him to have a fresh perspective and a new respect for the new covenant.

Due to this transformative experience, Paul now placed this new covenant, the gospel message of Jesus Christ, as the ultimate authority in his life. Therefore, the ministry of the law had a glory because it was a direct reflection of the glory of God. However, this new covenant, this new gospel message of Jesus Christ or this ministry of righteousness has a much more glory because it is the glory of the Spirit. This is why Paul boldly professed, "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day" (2 Cor. 4:16). Paul was edifying the ministry of the Spirit. Paul believes that even though the body may go through decay and even suffering, it is well worth it for the sake of the gospel. The gospel, or this ministry of the Spirit, will allow the Spirit to be renewed and refined even in the midst of bodily decay.

We can surmise that Paul found strength in knowing that his spirit was being edified even in the midst of suffering. He counted it joy to be able to suffer for the sake of the gospel. Paul believed that his suffering was a form of sacrifice which was necessary to spread this powerful gospel message. Jesus paid the ultimate sacrifice on the Cross which was the example for his followers. To be a disciple of Christ we must be like

Christ, therefore, if Christ had to sacrifice and suffer then he must be calling his disciples to sacrifice and suffer as well. However, the sacrifice is not in vain for the sacrifice for the follower of Christ will be an outward sacrifice however that sacrifice can be exchanged for an inward renewed and edified spirit. Paul is trying to convey this message to the Corinthian Church in this letter. If they would be willing to sacrifice for the sake of the gospel they would be able to win more souls for Christ. Not only would they be able to win more souls for Christ, but they themselves would be able to connect with Christ on a deeper level as their spirits would be renewed even while their body was being decayed.

Young Generation Suffering

The reason this scripture was chosen is to form the biblical foundation for this project, which is to address the suffering our young people are currently experiencing. This suffering has come from several sources. Young people are experiencing abandonment from society, government, and from the hands of the church. It is believed that one of the reasons why we do not see the attendance of young people in congregations is because the church may have abandoned millennials which has caused them to suffer. By no means is the church blamed for all the problems of people, however, it is believed that the church can improve its relationship with the younger generation. It is also believed that this millennial generation is more educated and more technologically advanced than any other generation in American history, which causes many generational challenges. For example, this generation is less likely to just accept or do whatever the church or the pastor says. There was a time where the pastor was the chief authority on many biblical and social matters. However, now with the addition of

technology and education there are people in the pews who are very suspicious of the information that comes from the pulpit. Especially since there have been cases of misuse of power and influence from the church and many other forms of power in society. Misuse of power has been the cause of great suffering for many people. The church has to embrace that we live in a culture that suggests that millennials will now want to know why they are being asked to do something.

Millennials will also want to know why the church has historically done certain things with a hermeneutic of suspicion. They will research the sermons and feel the need to audit the programs that the church offers. This causes a dilemma for the church because many times millennials will not find value with a church program that is behind technologically and rooted in tradition. They will especially not find value if they do not trust or are not inspired by the leadership of that program or church overall. Young people will become bored or impatient because the church will be the only institution that they are a part of that does not use or affirm the gift of technology. This causes a divide in whether or not millennials even feel welcome or a part of that particular congregation.

This issue goes deeper than the slow technological advancement of the church. Many issues that millennials are facing are not being talked about or dealt with at the church, which is the biggest form of abandonment that young people may feel. The leaders of the church, including the pastor, do not seem to be able to relate to some of the unique challenges young people are facing. The problem for this generation is not just the suffering itself, but they also have to deal with the fact that they feel as if no one in the church understands or cares. There are several forms of suffering that that young people carry that will be explained in more detail. These various forms of suffering do not

encompass everybody, but a majority of young people deal with some form of it and if the church is not equipped to deal with it or willing to address it then it will be interpreted by young people as a form of abandonment and in return the response will be, and has been, to abandon the church.

Student Loan Crisis

One major crisis facing the millennial generation is the crisis of student loan debt. For centuries this nation has prided itself on the notion that one should be able to get an education in order to succeed in life. Many battles were waged and fought just for the right to get a good education. It was universally believed that getting a good education would be the most important indicator of how well someone would be able to succeed. Having a degree is a source of pride and accomplishment. A person's educational achievement could also determine that persons social status. This is especially true for black people. Black people in this country has been denied the right to be able to learn how to read and write and when black people finally were allowed to learn they had to do so in subpar educational environments. So, having the ability to survive and thrive through all of those challenging conditions, people of color has flocked to educational institutions by the millions just to have the chance to say that they earned a degree, something that their parents and grandparent may not have had the opportunity to do. People of color have proven over the years that they had the ability and giftedness to acquire a higher education, the problem was not their ability to learn, the problem however was their ability to afford an education.

Just like everything else seems to have converted to, the education system has become big business in the United States. A person's educational achievements are not necessary based on his or her intellectual ability as much as it is based on his or her affordability. Millions of millennials are now facing student load debt because they bought into the dream that education was the way to reach their dreams, goals and success, however, many were led like an ox to the slaughter into financial suicide. Rising costs of tuition along with rising interest rates have propelled students further and deeper into debt. In the past twenty years the average cost of student debt has more than tripled. Millennials are disproportionately more likely to carry more student debt than any other generation.

> In 2010, the amount of total student loan debt in America reached $830 Billion. This was the first year that another form of personal debt exceeded that of credit card debt, which was $825 Billion that year. In 2013, that number has now grown to over $1 Trillion and will continue to do so at an estimated rate of 10 percent annually. The average debt amount per household with student loans is over $25,000.[3]

There are many effects that come with that reality. This means more millennials will live with their parents as opposed to living with their spouses or significant other. These realities are worse for those students who do not have parents as an option to fall back on. What this reality will mean for them is that they will have to get an apartment and be victim of consumer debt. Many millennials will be led down the path of getting credit cards or bank loans just to be able to afford a home, car or even a wedding. Many millennials may never even get to the point where they can qualify for a loan for a home or car and therefore be stuck down the economic ladder with no ability to get out. The

[3] Jennifer Wadia, "Rising Tuition Costs and the History of Student Loans," Student Debt Relief, accessed April 30, 2019, https://www.studentdebtrelief.us/news/rising-tuition-costs-and-the-history-of-student-loans/.

problem is that many of these millennials find themselves in crippling debt simply for following the rules and trying to achieve the American dream of furthering their education, buying a home and starting a family. This may be the cause as to why many millennials distrust many of our societal institutions which includes both education and religion. For too long people have followed the standard norms and found themselves suffering socially or economically.

The student debt crisis in America can cause an enormous amount of bitterness in people who are trying to advance themselves and actually wind up regressing themselves. Many young people grew up in homes where college was not an option. Therefore, when one goes to college and ends up leaving college with a degree but also with a mortgage sized amount of debt it can cause a great deal of stress and bitterness. Combine that with a society who has adopted the narrative that millennials are lazy, whiners, complainers and spoiled. There seems to be a bigger generational divide now then perhaps in the past. This narrative gleans over into the church. Bitter and frustrated millennials seem to have low patience and tolerance for Baby Boomers and others to look down on them while they enjoy the fruits of their labor at a lower cost. Inflation, student loans, changing laws and systems have cause a wider disparity in the economic gap than ever before. So many times, when millennials look at church, they do not see a place where they can encounter God, they see a place where an older generation gathers to socialize, and millennials are often left on the outside, abandoned, looking for a place where they can fit in.

The United States of America has always been the land of the plenty. However, the middle class has been declining ever since the 1970s and has reached a record low to likes this country have not seen since the great depression. The middle class has morphed

into the working class of the nineteenth century. The working class was a group of people who as long as they had a job, they could live paycheck to paycheck. However, if they stopped working or if they could not physically work any longer, then they would have no savings and have no way of taking care of themselves. With most families having no saving and barely enough income to survive each month, millennials are entering into an economy that is not necessarily working for them. People are willing to take lower wages for jobs with lowers attractiveness of the job market. This happens at the very same time products and cost of living continue to rise.

These are just a few examples of how and why millennials are struggling in current society. It is important that pastors not just exegete the text of biblical scripture, but we must also be willing and able to exegete the current conditions of society. This is why this particular scripture, Second Corinthians 4:9, was chosen as the foundation to this doctoral project because it directly speaks to the suffering and abandonment that is happening right now to the millennial generation. Millennials are feeling abandoned, pressed in on every side and even struck down by society and the economic systems that have been put in place. What the church needs to be willing to do is address these issues, these unique issues that a certain demographic is currently facing that may be foreign to an older demographic. The church needs to name these issues, speak against it, and attempt to step into the gap and try and resolve it or at the very least try and love young people through these problems if the church wants to remain relevant moving forward.

Student loan debt and a failing economy are not the only examples of suffering for millennials. There are several other factors of societal decisions that have been made which disproportionately effect this particular generation. For example, the slow

economic decline and erosion of the middle class. This factor plays a critical role on how one chooses what lifestyle he or she will have. The middle class is defined as people who have certain aspirations. People who would like to go to college or send their kids to college. People who want to own a house, go on a modest vacation every year, or have health insurance. They want to live in a safe neighborhood with good schools. They also want to be able to save money for retirement. Well the decline of the middle class means to me that most of those norms have now become luxuries. Instead of families being able to do all of those things they are increasingly having to choose one or the other. There are also cases where none of those options are realistic. Instead, people are now working longer hours with multiple jobs. They are getting paid lower wages and it is causing stress related illnesses. These factors are mentioned because it is believed that there is a correlation with the frustration and bitterness of working-class people in society and their relationship to God. People cannot afford to support their local church institution. People are also becoming increasingly uninterested and disengaged with aligning with their local church institution, especially if that church is not doing anything to address these particular economic issues.

Of course, the church is not the cause to the economic disparity in the world. However, the lack of sensitivity to this direct and real pain is a cause for frustration. Especially for the millennial generation who may not have grown up in church. This means that many young people get their view and understanding of what happens in church through television. The problem with that is there is a stereotype, real or imagined, that churches take money from poor people to make pastors rich. This is a real problem that once again must be dealt with if we are going to solve the issues of why

young people do not want to come to church. Television shows such as "Preachers of LA" do more to wedge a gap between the millennial generation and the church. "Preachers of LA" is a reality television series that premiered the Oxygen Network in October of 2013. This reality television show chronicled the lives of several pastors and bishops in the Los Angeles area in order to expose their lifestyle inside and outside of the church. The challenge with this show was many of these preachers edified the prosperity gospel and made it a point to expose their lavish lifestyle, luxury cars, expensive travel schedule and material wealth. While their argument was that they wanted to expose the human side to a spiritual calling, they only perpetuated the stereotype that church and preachers are living luxury tax free living while regular working-class people struggle.

In order to reach this younger generation, the church needs to do a better job of speaking to and meeting them at their area of need. The church cannot come off as an entitled institution that can take attendance for granted, but rather, the church should work to create a hospitable and welcoming culture that will attempt to meet you at your area of need and also give you a safe, spiritual and enjoyable worship experience. The church and its leaders have come across to often as judgmental, inflexible, staunch, boring and aloof towards younger people and they have responded by their lack of attendance support. Many millennials are growing up in households where they do not have to go to church as opposed to previous generations where going to church on Sunday was just as mandatory as going to school Monday through Friday. If the church wants to draw this younger generation in they will have to understand that young people are suffering to survive in a world that seems to have forgotten them. A world where Baby Boomers made decisions to benefit their present at the expense of the next

generation and now that generation is growing up. If the church is able to speak to the current suffering and not only preach but also practice a message of hope and deliverance there can be a mending of relationship and restoration of the gospel message that still has the power to penetrate any heart, which is the message Paul was speaking Second Corinthians.

Prison

Another challenge facing young people is the extraordinarily high prison rate in this country. America has 4% of the world's population yet has roughly 25% of the prison population in the world. America has the highest incarceration rate in the world. Year after year, the United States beats out much larger countries -- India, China – and more totalitarian ones --Russia and the Philippines -- for the distinction of having the highest incarceration rate in the world."[4] Children as young as thirteen years old have been sentenced to die in prison. Our prisons violate international standards. Solitary confinement is considered by international law to be torture, but in America it is not regulated by anyone but the prison officials. There are no appeals process to overturn solitary confinement. This is the most devastating form of punishment in our society. Convicts are ineligible to welfare, public housing, food stamps, voting and student loans. Convicts have a higher rate of suicide and homelessness. Being tough on crime does not have to mean being this tough on criminals. These war on crimes and war on drugs are actually, war on people, and our gospel has to speak truth to power and understand that Christ came to redeem and restore people because God loves people.

[4] Drew Kann, "Five Facts Behind America's High Incarceration Rate," CNN, accessed October 17, 2017, https://www.cnn.com/2018/06/28/us/mass-incarceration-five-key-facts/index.html.

The number of people incarcerated in America is disproportionately skewed towards young people of color. "By age 23, almost a thirst of Americans have been arrested for a crime, according to a new study that researchers say is a measure of growing exposure to the criminal justice system in everyday life."[5] That is significant because once a young person is arrested their lives will most likely be changed forever. According to the NAACP, African Americans are incarcerated at more than five times the rate of whites. The imprisonment rate for African American women is twice that of white women. When someone goes to prison it can have adverse effects to the nuclear family. A criminal record can drastically decrease the chances of someone receiving a call back for a job interview. Having a criminal record also reduces someone's earning potential throughout the course of their lives. Also, when one person is sentenced to a prison term, they are not available to be at home to raise their kids. Kids who are raised in single parent homes or no parents in the home experience challenges and sometimes fall victim to the criminal just system at a young age as well.

In 1994, President Bill Clinton signed supported and signed the habitual offender laws. This law, also known as the three strikes bill, imposes longer prison sentences for repeat offenders. The law states that a person with three serious crimes would serve a life sentence of at least twenty-five years on their third strike. While this law was supposed to solve the drug and crime problem in America by drastically punishing those who have committed two or more serious crimes it actually had an adverse effect on the black and Latino population. It placed more police officers on the streets who arrested more people

[5] Erica Goode, "Many in U.S. are Arrested by Age Twenty-Three, Study Finds," *New York Times*, accessed October 17, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/19/us/nearly-a-third-of-americans-are-arrested-by-23-study-says.html.

of color. According to the NAACP criminal fact sheet, African Americans are incarcerated at more than five times the rate as whites. Though African Americans and Hispanics make up 32% of the US population, they comprised 56% of all incarcerated people in 2015.[6] Many of them have been incarcerated for non-violent, drug related crimes. Many times, blacks and Latinos were imprisoned on felony charges for selling or possessing drugs and then sent away for mandatory sentences. This law had such a drastic and dehumanizing effect on people, black people in particular, that President Clinton admitted that he made a mistake by signing this bill in 2015 when addressing a group of Civil Rights leaders. Speaking to a civil rights group, he said: "I signed a bill that made the problem worse and I want to admit it." It put 100,000 more police officers on the streets but locked up "minor actors for way too long."[7] Mr. Clinton said.

The prison system has undoubtedly been harsher towards black people. This is an issue that the churches must understand and attempt to address on several levels. First and foremost, the church must be sensitive to the fact that many people who are in their congregations have been affected in some way by the judicial system. Either they have been incarcerated themselves or someone close to them have been incarcerated. In order for the church to evangelize to young people and get them more involved with the church there needs to be welcoming programming geared towards the specific challenges that come with living through the American justice systems. Church programming should be geared towards helping people acclimate themselves with society, learning practical job

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[6] "Criminal Justice Fact Sheep," NAACP, accessed October 19, 2017, https://www.naacp.org/criminal-justice-fact-sheet/.

[7] "Bill Clinton Regrets 'Three Strikes,'" *BBC News*, accessed October 19, 2017, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-33545971.

skills to be productive in society, or even partnering with local organizations and companies who will allow these people to get a job. There needs to be support groups and counseling and bereavement ministries to help families cope with the trauma of losing a loved one to incarceration. There also needs to be a strong youth and young adult ministry to help encourage and minister to young people, especially those who have lost one of their parents to the judicial system. While there are so many ministries that can be done regarding this area of need, the ministry that needs to be addressed is churches responding to the politics of the judicial system on a macro level.

The prison industry has allowed a select few people to become very wealthy because of the privatization of the prison, however it has caused much suffering and pain to many families and communities. These families and communities need ministry. Young people may not be as involved in church because they are dealing with extreme conditions of either crippling student loan, economic disparity, broken homes and the effects of a wayward judicial system. The church needs to understand this and view this as an opportunity to be creative in ministry to speak to the demands of their suffering. Church cannot be business as usual. However, the church still needs to look to the word of God as the authority and navigational tool to help address these issues.

Exegesis

Paul teaches, "But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us" (2 Cor. 4:7). These jars of clay are considered our physical bodies. The implication is clear, that even though our earthly bodies may suffer, our suffering cannot destroy the treasure that has been placed inside of

us. When one comes to believe in the gospel message of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit comes into our souls and illuminates our spirit with the gospel truth. We have this incredible treasure of the power, presence and illumination of the Holy Spirit. The power of God has been placed in these unimpressive vessels in order to reveal the ability of the power of God. Paul uses an analogy of earthen vessels because pottery and clay can be very fragile. Clay pots are easily broken and ruined. They can be shattered at a blink of an eye.

When Paul goes on to make these analogies how we are troubled on every side but not distressed, he is using the conjunction "but" to highlight that it is only because of the power of God that keeps an otherwise fragile clay pot from breaking. Paul is clearly pointing to the fact that without God, the suffering of this life is more than capable of destroying us. There is no way we as mere human mortals would be able to withstand the pressures of this life. So even though we may be suffering we should also note that we are still being used and able to point to the power of God that is working within us. Paul is pointing out the dichotomy of how we look on the outside, the appearance of cracks in our jars of clay, to the power of God working within us.

Another reason 2 Corinthians 4:9 was chosen is because it speaks directly to the issues of suffering. The preceding verse states, "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair" (2 Cor. 4:8). In that verse Paul is making a comparison between being troubled and yet not being distressed. It speaks to the issue of acknowledging the trouble that is happening presently but also choosing how to respond to that trouble. By that Paul is clearly stating that our present troubles do not have the power to define our ultimate outcome. This is a message of hope for anyone

who may be facing disparity. Paul is clearly pointing to notion that suffering does not have to hinder someone from achieving greatness for the Lords sake. He also states that "We are perplexed, but not in despair." Once again Paul speaks to the challenge of his current reality and choosing how to respond to that reality. He acknowledges that we are perplexed, however that does not mean we have to be in despair.

Some scholars suggest that he was speaking about his literal predicament that he was in at the time he wrote this letter. Even if that was the case, we can still glean spiritual truths that make this passage relevant for what we are dealing with today. This is a message of hope and encouragement which can be used to reach our young people who often times feel troubled on every side and perplexed with the current conditions of society. However, the church should champion the message that while we are troubled, we do not have to be distressed; and while we are perplexed, we do not have to live in despair. We are perplexed. Many times, we do not understand what God is doing in our lives but the reason why we are

Paul continues on in this passage, "Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed" (2 Cor. 4:9). Paul was clearly "persecuted," pursued and punished by his enemies, but he could testify that he was "not forsaken" or ever left alone. Paul always proclaimed that he was accompanied by the Spirit of God who led him and because of that he was not overtaken by the enemies. He even wrote to the Philippians, "But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel; so that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places" (Phil. 1:12-13). Paul wrote this letter while he was in prison. The reader witnesses the evidence of Paul always acknowledging and

understanding that even when he was in prison; he could always say that the Lord stood by him. When Paul speaks to being cast down, but not destroyed; he was alluding to the fact that he was smitten down, but the enemy or his persecutors, where unable to destroy or kill him. Actually, in all these phrases Paul is making a play on words which is lost in the translation into English. In order to transliterate what Paul was saying in English we would be able to paraphrase it this way; "I am struck down, but I have not been not struck out."

"We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body" (2 Cor. 4:10). Paul continues in verse ten with speaking to the connection with the death in physical body so that Jesus Christ can be revealed. As we become weak and die in the ministry Jesus can become stronger and exposed through our ministry. Because we have a dying earth and vessel, our weakness is visible. Within that weakness there is a contrast that exposes the power and strength of the gospel ministry of Jesus Christ. On the outside our vessel is cracked and decaying but on the inside are strength is being ever-renewed. The reality of life reveals God's strength through our death. So, while the real hardships of life can hit every one of us, it is through our humility and our ability to allow God to take over our situations where the gospel can be revealed. It is revealed because people realize that there was no way we could have made it through the public hardships that we have had to endure. Those are the moments where witnesses have to conclude that within the cracked vessel of our lives, we are stewards of the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The appearance is that we are persecuted but the reality is that we are not forsaken. The appearance is that we are struck down, but the reality is God is still working in us. The reality is that whatever

is being seen on the outside that God has not discarded us and is still willing to use us to spread the glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are all dealing with spiritual, emotional and relational challenges that appear to be destroying us but in the life of the believer these challenges are opportunities for Christ to show his power in our lives. These are opportunities for God to show his power, his strength and his ability to do great things in and through our lives.

The suffering can be an opportunity for us to invite God to take over and do something greater. In order for the church to create relevant and meaningful programming that will encourage young people to reengage with the church there has to a message that speaks to being struck down but also infuses the hope and optimism that we have not been struck out. Young people need to know that they still have a fighting chance to succeed in this world and the church is there to help navigate them down that road. Spirituality cannot be separated with how everyday lives are lived. In contrast, it is believed that spirituality should be the guiding influential force that helps the believer on their journey through life. If the church wants to attack younger people back to the church, she needs to do a better job of linking the spirituality with the current conditions and struggles of their lives. Young people want to know how their spiritual life intersects with what they see and feel and endure each and every day. Paul does a great job of speaking to the practical human condition of suffering but yet uniting it with the hope of the Gospel message in order to empower people to live a better life now. Paul seems to be fighting a losing battle. Paul makes it clear that he is very weak in many ways and yet, in his weakness, he is made strong through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Our young people need to feel empowered to be able elevate from surviving to thriving in a society that has seemed to abandon and or forget them. Even though young people may suffer and feel abandoned, the gospel of Christ can encourage them that the Lord can still use their weakness and make them strong. Paul lived out this gospel message that he preached. In order to exegete this letter to the Corinthians we need to also pay attention to the life Paul actually led. He practiced what he preached. Paul was a crippled, weak, sickly Jew who went up against the mighty juggernaut of Roman power. He brought a message that withered the Roman Empire. Even the historian Gibbon said that the Roman Empire could not stand up against the preaching of the gospel of Christ. Paul was so weak, yet God delivered him again and again. Paul was used in miraculous ways, often through the intervention of the power of the Holy Spirit, but Paul was also very pragmatic in his approach. Paul's life was proof that God works through weak people like him. That does not mean that Paul was a weak person; clearly, he was strong both in his mind and body. What it means is that even the strongest person in mind and body can have weak and vulnerable moments or seasons in their lives. However, God is with you through everything and when we are at our weakest points God can still use us to do great things. Paul suffered more troubles than most people do. Those troubles showed Paul's weakness; but at the same time, God showed his strength through Paul.

Paul's words in this passage are extremely powerful. People used similar words to describe men who were fighting. Paul's situation often seemed desperate; his complete defeat and death seemed certain. However, each time God acted powerfully to rescue him, as Paul explains in Second Corinthians 1:8-10. This happened very many times. In Second Corinthians 4:8-9, Paul describes his experiences in several different ways. Paul's

enemies caused him great troubles. Paul believed that his enemies were pressing against him on every side. For Paul, this was not just an illustration but a reality. However, they could not defeat him. God provided space for him to persevere and survive. In his troubles, Paul seemed like someone who had lost his direction; however, he did not lose his fighting spirit. He never gave into despair. He might have lost everything that has earthly or material value, but God strengthened his spirit and always provided what he needed. Paul's enemies opposed him viscously. On many occasions they attempted to intimidate him and run him away. The good news for him was that whenever he had to endure this type of persecution he was never alone because the Holy Spirit was always with him. Even if it looked as though Paul suffered defeat, it was clear that God was still working out his perfect plan in his life. This is why Paul writes in his letter to the Romans, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who[a] have been called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

Paul writes to the Corinthian church and encourages them to put their eternal hope in a God who would never leave them or forsake them. He refers to the trouble both he and the apostles go through. His argument suggests that believing in Christ means that not only could you be persecuted by your enemies, but you could also be forsaken by people close to you. Therefore, Paul is preparing people through his letter that if you believed in this gospel message you would no doubt receive persecution. Persecution is a prerequisite for accepting the mantle of spreading the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. However, having that mantle is well worth it because it means that you have received eternal life and salvation. This salvation cannot be earned, and it is certainly not deserved. Therefore, anyone who is suffering for Christ should rejoice for being in a

privileged position. This is a challenging concept for those who listened to that message at the time. There were gentiles who had to step out on faith and believe teachings that asked them to be a slave for Christ.

The term slave would have been a hard term to receive for Gentiles, especially since they had no background knowledge and training in the Torah. They were being asked to be a slave for Christ and believe in a Messiah who would be coming back again. That message would surely attract enemies from every side of the aisle. Their own people would surely think they were crazy and Jews would think they did not deserve the message of the kingdom. Paul was teaching them that even though they were pressed on every side they would not be crushed. Even though they were perplexed he encouraged them to not be in despair. While they had to endure persecution such as the apostles did, they would not be abandoned. Even though they could potentially be struck down they would not be destroyed.

Paul uses his life and the life of the apostle who he knew as an example to prove the validity of his teaching. Paul refers to some of the trials to which he was subjected to which helped him to make known the gospel in which he preached. Paul was open about what he endured for preaching this true gospel. He was careful and strategic to do that in order to show that the gospel he preached had sustaining power even in the midst of all of the pain and suffering he endured. Paul was constantly surrounded by foes and lived in great physical need. They had need for better living conditions, food, water and encouragement. They had to endure circumstances which they had not anticipated and because of that they were perplexed. Even though they found themselves in a state of perplexity, they were still not in despair. They were not able to be destroyed because their

hope was not in this world but in the gospel message of Jesus Christ. Their needs were provided for by God and not by man. Their embarrassments were removed as well as their grounds of perplexity were taken away. They received unexpected strength and resources which was supernaturally imparted to them. When they did not know what to do; when all resources failed them, in some unexpected manner they would be relieved and saved from absolute despair. This is Paul's message to the Christians. Paul is suggesting that various points in the life of the believer God will interpose by his grace, various ways to deliver His people from absolute despair and suffering. The ultimate relief of suffering will be when the believer reunites with Jesus Christ and is permitted to live in the presence of God for eternity.

Summary

The church needs to get involved in the political and social arena of life in order to speak truth to power. Paul spoke truth to King Agrippa and Jesus stood up to Pontius Pilate. In each case, they did so in order to represent those who were voiceless and to demonstrate that the power of God had authority over earthly power. The gospel of Christ has the ability to speak to the structures of government and give people hope and empowerment to advance God's agenda even at the hands of suffering. People are suffering in our schools, in our communities, in relationships, and we need the power of the gospel message to give our lives purpose even in the midst of our struggle. Young people need to hear this message.

It is extremely difficult for a young developing mind to reconcile the trials and the tribulations of life by themselves. This is why church needs to adopt a more welcoming

hermeneutic and continue to strive to live out the gospel it preaches. Young people pay more attention to what they see than what they hear or say. Jesus, once again, gives us the perfect example for this. He fed over 5000 people with two fish and five loaves of bread. He did that because he understood that the gospel must be lived out and pragmatic. Then the teaching and preaching that follows it helps the listener to understand what exactly they just witnessed. The leaders of the church need to understand that living out the principles of the gospel will go a long way in reaching young people to Christ. Once they truly live it out with faith, they can then teach what they have already gone through in order to ignite the revelation of the Holy Spirit to encourage the millennial generation.

This means that the dichotomies of life should not be lied about, or sugar coated when it comes to young people. The current generation of leaders need to be more transparent about the struggles of the faith. Too many times the church preaches a gospel that insist that people need to be perfect, need to be healthy, need to be rich and need to be popular. That message as a whole is not resonating with young people because they are trying to figure out how to deal with true life everyday struggles. What millennials are looking for is access to mentors. Access means truly understanding the behind the scenes working of how it is to be successful. The true definition of it, the struggles that go with it, the pain and the suffering. Young people are desperately searching for authenticity. They want to know what they really have to look forward to and whenever the church is able and willing to offer that gospel message, the truth of the gospel with the hope that is attached to it, the young people will embrace the notion of spirituality and church.

Young people are looking for authenticity and transparency regarding marriage, ministry, business, health, government and a variety of other issues. Not only are they

looking for authenticity, but they are also looking for integrity. The power of the preaching moment is a great opportunity to speak to those needs and offer hope to these young adults. Millennials are far too often let down by the lack of integrity by people who are influential and in power. That is not to say that they are looking for any man to be perfect, but it is to say they are looking for leaders, either in the church or the public square, to be honest about their struggle and fight to do what is right. Too many times leaders are playing by a double standard and a different set of rules which can be disheartening and troubling to a generation of people. Leaders who make excuses for their actions but look to condemn somebody else who commit the same offense is troublesome. Millennials will be drawn to an authentic ministry as much as they will a successful ministry.

In conclusion, all is not lost for the next generation. There is hope and it is up to the church to continue to preach that message. No matter how much people have suffered, they can still be used for God's greater glory. When that message is communicated intergenerationally there can be reconciliation and inclusion in the church. When the truth of the gospel is not only preached, but lived out, then young people will be drawn to the work of Christ. There is redemptive power in the gospel. Paul teaches us that even when challenges are pressing in on us on every side, yet we are not crushed. We may be perplexed or confused but we are not in despair. We may even be persecuted but we are never abandoned. We may even be stuck but we are not destroyed.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

There is a huge void in the church today regarding our young adults. Our millennial generation are noticeably absent and uninterested in church. To better understand why that is we must be sure to understand the key moments in history which shaped the current context. Then we can attempt to glean from history what might have changed in the current ecclesiastical context which may have caused this shift. The Civil Rights Movement during the second half of the nineteenth century played a critical and vital role in shaping the black church even as we understand it today. The historical Civil Rights Movement will be used starting from the Emancipation Proclamation to the end of the nineteenth century, to examine not only the status of the church but the manner in which the church is currently operating. The goal is to examine the reason why pastors see a void with the millennial generation in the church today.

Could it be because churches are still operating in traditions that were formed during this moment in history? There is a disconnect between the millennial generation and the modern church perhaps because the young adults of today are trying to compete in a world that has moved on from the reconstruction era of the second half of the nineteenth century while the church is still behind and, in many ways, still operating the way they did in that era. Therefore, young adults are not attracted to the modern-day church which is actually stuck in the past. On the other hand, an argument can be made

that the church has went away from some of the key fundamental principles that made it so successful during this generation. If the church were to return back to its fundamental roots, she may able to attract a lost generation who are desperate to be connected to an organization that has social and spiritual relevance.

The pivotal moment of the second half of the nineteenth century for America, especially for African Americans, was the Emancipation Proclamation. Immediately following the historic decision of President Abraham Lincoln to free the slaves the African American Civil Rights movement began. This movements primary goal was to eliminate the blatant discrimination that was waged against black people in America at that time. Even though black people were now free they still faced incredible opposition regarding how they were perceived and even treated. These issues were so prevalent that there had to be several reconstruction amendments made to the Constitution to be able to regulate the underlying tensions that were bubbling up to the surface in America.

The African American Civil Rights Movement motivated many freed blacks to participate in politics.[1] Their goal was to influence the laws that were being written which were, up until this point, incredibly one sided against African American people. Many black churches were formed during this time and the pastors and leaders in these churches were the main people getting involved in politics. Black churches were forming at expedited rate mainly because they were not allowed to worship freely in white churches and the few integrated churches of white people who tolerated black people would still not have them in leadership. Therefore, black people formed their own churches because these churches were not supported by white people, black preachers

[1] "Emancipation Proclamation," History, accessed November 16, 2017, https://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/emancipation-proclamation.

and leaders could speak freely about the social, political and economic issues that plagued the black community. Black churches were also motivated to create and build their own institutions and organizations such as HBCU's (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) as well as influential organizations such as the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) and the Urban League.

Civil Rights Movement Nineteenth Century

Many of the issues that were tormenting the black community during the African American Civil Rights Movement in the nineteenth century are still prevalent today. It is interesting that the more things change the more things stay the same. Young people today are missing from the church because either the church has lost its influence and power because the church is not addressing these issues in a way that they once did. Perhaps if the church went back to its historical roots, separated itself from the influence of the same government who seeks to oppress its people, and unite in a sacrificial way aimed at lifting black people as a whole, young people will be attracted once again to come back to the church.

Following the Emancipation Proclamation decision there was an seismic shift in the fortunes for the black community in America. Now that slavery was abolished, black people officially came into a tangible new era in American culture. The Emancipation Proclamation was drafted during the civil war by President Lincoln. "While the Emancipation Proclamation did not free a single slave, it was an important turning point in the war, transforming the fight to preserve the nation into a battle for human

freedom."[2] Slavery was the elephant in the room that could no longer be ignored and even until this day America is feeling the consequences of its original sin. Historically, the black church has always responded to the political landscape that has affected its people. We can never separate black culture in America with the black church experience. Black people has historically had the black church as a spiritual navigation tool to help enlighten their journey through this American voyage. The Emancipation Proclamation is a perfect example of how the black church responded to the political and social landscape of the day. To this day the black church celebrates "watch night" service each year on New Year's Eve. This service was birthed in anticipation of the Emancipation Proclamation. In 1862, on New Year's Eve, many slaves gathered all around the south in order to watch and pray that President Lincoln would indeed go through with his initial plan to free the slaves.[3] African American churches around the country still hold a watch night service late into the night on New Year's Eve, not only celebrate our Lord Jesus Christ, but to celebrate the Emancipation Proclamation. Even today this service commemorates that faithful and original New Year's Eve night when slaves anticipated the freedom of slavery. For on the morning of January 1, 1863 President Lincoln did in fact confirm the freedom of slaves.[4]

Another historic political achievement of the Civil Rights Movement of the nineteenth century was The Civil Rights Act of 1866. This act was officially put into law

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[2] "Emancipation Proclamation," History, accessed November 16, 2017, https://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/emancipation-proclamation.

[3] "Emancipation Proclamation," History, accessed November 16, 2017, https://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/emancipation-proclamation.

[4] "Emancipation Proclamation," History, accessed November 16, 2017, https://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/emancipation-proclamation.

on April 9, 1866. This was the United States Federal Law used to define American citizenship and affirm that all citizens are equally protected by the law. With this Act being placed into law could point to the birth of Civil Rights Movement. This was the first law in American history that details the rights that all American citizens should enjoy, regardless of race. This was an astounding law establishes, for the first time, the equality of basic rights for all Americans. It lists the basic rights, for example, the right to own property or the right to sign a contract. It agrees that the states are not allowed to discriminate regarding the rights of black people. The Civil Rights Acts of 1866 was intended to protect the basic civil and human rights of persons of African descent born in the United States. This Act is still in law today and many would argue that it is a stronger law then the Civil Rights Act of 1964 because people believe colored people had more freedoms and rights in 1866 than they did in 1964. This law introduces the concepts of equality into the Constitution. The Constitution is now a document where groups of people who feel discriminated against can fight and protest for their equal rights. This is based up on the passage of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution of the United States.[5]

Politics and Transformational Leaders

In the year 1865 the Thirteenth Amendment eliminated slavery in the United States. The United States government allowed Union Troops to enforce the newly minted Emancipation Proclamation legislation in Texas. Once again, the black church responded to this action because the Juneteenth celebrations were formed, and most black churches

[5] "Fourteenth Amendment," History, accessed November 16, 2017, https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/fourteenth-amendment.

acknowledge these celebrations to this day. On June 19, 1865 (hence the name "Juneteenth") the United States of America announced the abolition of slavery in the state of Texas. Since the enslaved African Americans were now emancipated black people celebrate each year in June for what they call "Freedom Day." The Fourteenth Amendment states that every American who was born in the United States, including slaves, are natural citizens of the United States. This was an important Amendment to ensure protection of black people in particular from unfair or unjust laws against them.[6]

Towards the end of the nineteenth century one of the most devastating events happened that almost set back the Civil Rights movement. In 1896 the Supreme Court ruled in the Plessy v. Ferguson case and concluded that "separate but equal" racial segregation was constitutional. The response to this ruling was that all over the south states began to pass laws that would blatantly disenfranchise black people. It was during this time that the birth of the Jim Crow laws came into being. The Jim Crow laws were a set of laws during the Reconstruction Era that enforced racial segregation. These laws were enforced from the mid to late 1800's through 1965. "Certainly, the black church responded to the Jim Crow laws as the modern-day civil rights movement, the movement of the twentieth century which was rooted and formed out of the black church, played a key role in ultimately forcing these laws to come to an end."[7]

Immediately following the Civil War, the federal government began a program known as Reconstruction. The goal of this federal program was to rebuild the former

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[6] "Fourteenth Amendment," History accessed November 16, 2017, https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/fourteenth-amendment.

[7] "Fifteenth Amendment," History, accessed November 16, 2017, https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/fifteenth-amendment.

Confederacy states of the south. This federal program allowed former slaves to integrate into society as free men and women along with providing federal aid to help with that process. Black people were able to gain a lot of political and financial power during this time as they were able to own land and escape from poverty as well as participate in the political process.[8]

Engaging in the political process were ambitious young black men and women. So many prominent leaders rose up during this era and were instrumental in leading black people towards mental and physical freedom. Each of these prominent political and educational leaders and activist had roots in the black church. One of the most important figures during this era was Frederick Douglass. Frederick Douglass was an escaped slaved who later became an author, publisher, lecturer and one of the most prominent black figures of his time. He became one of the most famous intellectuals of his time, advising presidents and lecturing to thousands on a range of causes, including women's rights and Irish home rule. In New Bedford, Massachusetts, Frederick Douglass joined a local black church and regularly attended abolitionist meetings. Douglass once wrote: "From my earliest recollection, I date the entertainment of a deep conviction that slavery would not always be able to hold me within its foul embrace; and in the darkest hours of my career in slavery, this living word of faith and spirit of hope departed not from me but remained like ministering angels to cheer me through the gloom."[9] Clearly Frederick Douglass was inspired and motivated by his faith to do the works outside of the church

[8] "Fifteenth Amendment," History, accessed November 16, 2017, https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/fifteenth-amendment.

[9] Frederick Douglass, *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave* (Overland Park, KS: Digireads Publishing, 2003), 31.

that would make him so influential and revered. On the twenty-fourth anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, in 1886, Douglass gave a famous speech in Washington D.C. where he denounced slavery, poverty and a society that organized and conspired to oppress, rob and degrade vulnerable and disenfranchised people. [10]

Booker T. Washington was another dominant leader in the African American community in the late nineteenth century. He was one of the most well-known African American in his time. He was one of the most celebrated people in the African American community in his time. He was an author, speaker, educator and even advisor to Presidents. In 1881, Washington was named as the first leader of the new Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, founded for the higher education of blacks at the age of twenty-five. During the post reconstruction period there were high tensions between African Americans and Southern White Americans. In the mainstream national and local media of the late nineteenth century blacks were persistently stereotyped as criminals, savages, or comic figures. "His address in 1895 in Atlanta, Georgia to a predominantly white cloud gave him national attention. Booker T. Washington felt like he had to create a bargain with white Americans by encouraging black people to accept their unequal position in society while also secretly funding and participating in the political process to advance the Civil Rights Movement."[11]

Even though Booker T. Washington was a prominent black leader in this time that does not mean he did not attack critics from his own race. Late in his career, Washington

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[10] "Frederick Douglass," History, accessed November 16, 2017, https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/frederick-douglass.

[11] Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery* (New York, NY: Dover Publications Inc., 1995), 145-154.

was criticized by another prominent civil rights leader and founder of the NAACP, W.E.B. Du Bois. Du Bois and his supporters opposed the Atlanta Address as the "Atlanta Compromise," because he believed that it suggested that African Americans should bow down to those in power, white people. Washington wanted African Americans to sacrifice voting rights and political power in exchange for economic power and advancement. "Washington believed that African Americans would achieve success and be accepted into white dominant society by gradually becoming economically valuable."[12] Instead of being subjugated to white power Du Bois would rather have had full civil rights, as well as more political and judicial power for African Americans. Du Bois believed that this could only be achieved through activism and higher education for African Americans. So even though Du Bois initially supported Washington, he went on to criticize his rival and eventually labeled him, "the Great Accommodator." Washington's response was that confrontation could lead to disaster for the outnumbered blacks. Washington felt that the best long-term strategy to overcome racism was to unite with white people who were down for the same causes as blacks.[13]

W.E.B. Dubois was an American sociologist, historical civil rights leader and author. Du Bois received a PhD from Harvard University in 1895. "Du Bois was also a gradualist, but a political gradualist. He believed that the key to uplifting the race was for African Americans to assume more and more political power, and that such a goal could only be accomplished through the education of the 'talented tenth' of the population that

[12] Bond, *Contemporary African American Preaching*, 24.

[13] Washington, *Up from Slavery*, 145-154.

could benefit from higher education."[14] Du Bois was a well-known published author. One of his publications, *The Philadelphia Negro*, was a sociological study of an African American community in the United States of America. In this particular study he realized the African American community was poorer in their overall health, finances and self-esteem. He did not totally absolve the Negro for their part in their own condition, however he made it very clear that American racism was a major factor the deterioration of this particular community. He believed that African Americans needed the chances for advanced education to develop its leadership. DuBois was a strong advocate against racism, discrimination and especially the Jim Crow laws. Du Bois rose to national prominence as the leader of the Niagara Movement which was a group of African American activists who wanted equal rights for blacks. DuBois was also a very gifted and talented author. He was well read and even used one of Frederick Douglass' phrases, "color line" to deal with a central theme of one of his most popular books,[15] *The Souls of Black Folk*. In this book his central thesis was "The problem of the 20th center is the problem of the color-line."[16]

There were even popular women leaders who inspired progress for black people during the Civil Rights Movement in the nineteenth century. One of popular leader, Sojourner Truth, was a black woman who advocated for women's right as well as civil rights. In 1826 Truth fled her master and became a free woman. After she was a free woman, she radically challenged the status quo and went to court to challenge the white

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[14] Bond, *Contemporary African American Preaching,* 24.

[15] W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago, IL: A. C. McClurg and Company, 1903), 1-2.

[16] DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk,* 1-2.

man who sold her son into slavery. In 1828 Truth became the first black woman to win a major case against a white man. This case was a remarkable victory and very unlikely to happen during that time. She too was a spiritual woman who believed that God gave her a testimony and she was commissioned to share her story to everyone when she had a chance. Through her spirituality she felt led to change her name to Sojourner Truth. She even wrote about how she left the city and went into the countryside in order to "testify about the hope that was in her." Her best-known speech was delivered in 1851, at the Ohio Women's Rights Convention in the city of Akron. The title of that speech was "Ain't I a Woman?" In 2014, Truth was included in *Smithsonian* magazine's list of the "100 Most Significant Americans of All Time."

Another inspiring woman who was involved in the Civil Rights Movement in the nineteenth century was Ida B. Wells. Wells was a powerful African American woman journalist who led an anti-lynching crusade in the 1890's. She once famously said, "A Winchester rifle should have a place of honor in every black home, and it should be used for that protection which the law refuses to give."[17] A fearless woman who was also a spiritual woman, yet she knew the importance of black people having the power to protect themselves. She understood that even though she believed in God and the church, she also believed that black people needed inspiration and direction when it came to advance their causes and having the power and protection to be safe while doing it. Wells used her influence and newspaper in Memphis, Tennessee to fight against lynching even

[17] Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in all its Phases* (New York, NY: Project Gutenburg, 2005), ebook.

at the threat of losing her own life. She then moved to Chicago, IL in 1892 and continued her work there.[18]

All of these dynamic leaders have things in common. They all found solace in the black church to birth, encourage and propel their movement. However, they all were willing to go out of the four walls of the church to engage in the social condition of the black man and black woman. With so much oppression going on at this time black people needed to have courageous charismatic leadership who were willing to step in the gap to fight for their rights and needs. Many of these leaders were fighting for the younger generation and often times were younger themselves. Either in their twenties or early to mid-thirties, these courageous leaders were willing to step up and challenge the establishment, and sometimes even challenge each other, in order to passionately move the plight of black people forward. In the black church today, young people do not see these same types of qualities in their leaders even though they are facing the same type of challenges. While the millennial generation, who are in their twenties and early thirties now, still has the same fighting spirit as those who were in their age range during the Civil Rights Movement of the nineteenth century, they are not finding leadership roles or support from the church like before, therefore, they are forming their own organizations not rooted or started in the church.

Whether it was any of the civil rights heroes mentioned above during this time, or even Harriett Tubman, who was referred to as Moses from the Bible for freeing slaves, it is obvious that spirituality played an important role and acted as a source of inspiration for the movement. These leaders had a love for people combined with a hatred for sin or

[18] Wells-Barnett, *Southern Horrors*, ebook.

injustice and was willing to act out their faith in God that black people should have a better living experience in America. In order for the church to survive today and continue to get the younger generation involved there needs to be a return to the commitment of churches addressing the condition of black people. The church needs to be willing to act out what she believes to be true about the gospel and get active in the political process and economic advancement of our people in order to attract the younger generation again.

Social Status

Clearly, some of the same challenges in the late nineteenth century are witnessed in the current culture. For example, lynching was a prominent problem during that time. Lynching was a huge problem in America for a long period of time. Especially in the late 1800's. In the American South there were many lynch mobs who targeted and terrorized black people. Almost 5,000 people were lynched from 1882 to the end of the century, 3500 of those were African American. Lynching happened more frequently in black communities and in communities of low economic status. Even though there were cases of lynching of poor rural white people the majority of lynching were aimed towards black people.

While we do not see lynching today in the same way that we did in the late nineteenth century, we do still see the attack on the black community in other ways. Most African American neighborhoods in the United States suffer from an economic disparity when compared to any other ethnic group. There is a lack of resources and a lack of education that is disproportionate in the black community compared to any other community. One of the negative consequences of that would be the disproportionate

amount of black people who fill state penitentiary and prison system today. In her book, *The New Jim Crow*, author Michele Alexander compares the modern-day prison crisis for black people to historical slavery. She argues that the deep inherent racism that can be proven throughout the history of America, for example the Jim Crow laws, has led to slavery and has metamorphosed into the modern-day prison industry. Black people may not be literal slaves on the plantation like they once were, but they are still slaves in shackles working for low to no wages in our current prison system. They have been stripped from their rights and have lost their dignity due to an unfair judicial system and court system that have created laws that specifically target blacks.[19]

We can see the origins of this mentality well before the Civil Rights Movement in the nineteenth century, however this movement was one of the first times black people were organized and able to address these issues systematically with some sort of power and relevance in this country. The Jim Crow laws of the South continued to perpetuate segregation and the unlawful treatment of black people in America. Also, in the South were the Black Codes. The Black Codes were enforced in seven states across the South which further perpetuated the mistreatment and discrimination specifically targeted to black people and how they were perceived and able to act in society.

To this day some of the same issues continue to be a problem for black Americans. We have seen in the past few years American society collectively look down upon and mistreat black people. There have been several instances where a black person who had not committed a crime was shot and killed by white police or a white civilian and yet the person who killed them was not convicted of a crime. This is in direct

[19] Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2012), 21-31.

violation of the Fourteenth Amendment which calls for every citizen to be treated equally under the law and they are also permitted to due process. With this mistreatment of black people all around the country playing out on the national stage the millennial generation, in particular, is noticeably upset. Their anger can be directed in several directions. They are upset with the social injustices in the world, but they are also upset by the lack of modern-day movements or visible responses collectively by the black church. Millennials perceive the black church as a whole to be quiet on these specific issues of social injustice and economic disparities and therefore have organized and formed outside of the church because they view the church as useless or non-impactful.

One of the most popular organized group of primarily Millennial Black Activist is a group known as Black Lives Matter (BLM). "In 2013, three radical Black organizers—Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi—created a Black-centered political will and movement building project called #BlackLivesMatter. It was in response to the acquittal of Trayvon Martin's murderer, George Zimmerman."[20] This international activist movement birthed by young black Americans organized with the sole intentions to campaign against racial profiling, police brutality and racial and economic inequality in the United States. Black Lives Matter organized street demonstrations following two additional deaths of unarmed black people, Eric Garner in New York City and Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri.

In the summer of 2015 Black Lives Matter activist become involved with the 2016 United States Presidential Election. This national movement has spread to having over thirty chapters across the United States. This is exactly the type of movement that

[20] "Herstory," Black Lives Matter, accessed April 30, 2019, https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/herstory/.

should be engaged with the modern black church if the church wants to be relevant to the millennial generation. Rather than look down on the differences of young people, the church should understand that this is the position that young people hold. The church should look to the historical Civil Rights Movement and become a place where young people can organize, strategize and structure their organization and create an action plan that is shaped and rooted in godly principles. The millennial generation could be very interested in the church if the church was partnering and encouraging this type of movement. The church needs to continue to evolve and become a source of political, financial and educational support to help shape leaders who will be equipped to go out into the market place and shape the cultural experience for black people. For many millennials the church has become a gathering place for black people to have a spiritual experience but yet not take that experience to influence the culture.

Role of the Church

Black churches played a powerful role in the African American Civil Rights Movement. The great majority of the black Baptist and Methodist churches separated from the white national or regional church denominations after 1865. While becoming independent and separated from the white churches, black churches formed and created their own cultures which specifically dealt with the advancement and upbuilding of black people in America. Black Baptist congregations set up their own associations and conventions. Churches were the central hub for their community group. They strengthened black people in regard to their spiritual and mental health. Black people learned to love themselves through the teachings and fellowship they gained in the black

church. They would also receive their education in the church. Black people learned how to read and write in Sunday school and many times their schoolteachers worshipped with them in the same church. Preachers became the leading political spokesman for their congregations. Black women also found their own space and church-sponsored organizations. Black women were valued inside these organizations and were encouraged to sing on choirs and lead missionary projects. They also taught in church schools and Sunday schools.[21]

Black Baptists broke from the white churches and formed independent operations across the South, rapidly forming state and regional associations. Unlike the Methodists, who had a hierarchical structure led by bishops, the Baptist churches were independent of each other. Baptist would pool their resources for missionary activities, especially missions in Africa. Black churches had numerous activities such as scheduled prayer meetings, missionary societies, women's clubs, youth groups, public lectures, and musical concerts. There were regularly scheduled revivals that would sometimes be a week-long, yet it reached many appreciative people. Revivals were often well attended and full of spirit. The money raised from revivals helped strengthen the churches economically. Charitable activities were formed and allowed the church to care for the sick and needy. The larger churches were able to create a systematic education program beyond just Sunday schools and Bible study. They held literacy classes to enable older members to read the Bible. Churches also supported the struggling small business community. The church played a huge role in shaping the social culture and operated as a unifying force. Being connected to the church was being connected to black people as a whole. That is

[21] R. Drew Smith, William Ackah, and Anthony G. Reddie, *Churches, Blackness, and Contested Multiculturalism: Europe, Africa, and North America* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 55-67.

where black people gained their direction and understanding of what was going on in the world and how they should and could respond to what was going on.

Black churches also got involved in the political process. "This view of the Christian faith is commonly held both inside and outside of organized churches, thereby supporting the conservative role that religion has often played in politics."[22] Churches hosted protest meetings, rallies, and Republican party conventions. Preachers and educated people ran for political office. They also engaged in the political process with local politicians to try and influence the political landscape in their area. Preachers could be more outspoken since they did not primarily depend on white support. Therefore, preachers could speak freely about the social ills of the community and encourage politicians to pay attentions to their needs. One of the pressing needs for black people was increasing education and having better schools. The African American community engaged in a long-term struggle for quality public schools. By the end of Reconstruction state funding for black schools was minimal, and facilities were quite poor.

Many colleges in the South were segregated; a handful of northern colleges accepted black students. The church got involved and created private schools. Northern denominations got involved and helped create or fund elements and secondary schools for blacks in the south. Funding for education for blacks in the South came from multiple sources. Religious organizations continually contributed a large amount of money to help increase the quality of education for black people. However, the church was also instrumental through its leaders to persuade the government to invest in black schools as well. Therefore, through black churches, the government and even philanthropy,

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[22] James H. Cone, *Speaking the Truth: Ecumenism, Liberation, and Black Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 35.

education ranging from elementary schools to college were able to receive funding. This happened through the influence, visibility and efforts of the black church.[23]

Summary

In conclusion, the Civil Rights Movement of the late nineteenth century was a critical time for both black culture and the black church. There were strong influential leaders who were courageous enough to step up and fight for the progress of black people. Interestingly enough the majority of those black figures had some connection or received inspiration from the black church. The black church was central to the culture of black people. So much so that often times black people were identified not just by their surname but also by their church affiliation. Therefore, in order to have young people interested in church as they were during this historical era the church will need to have the same cultural impact. The church will need to have leaders and charismatic figures who are welcome in church, nurtured in church and influenced by the church to go out in society succeed and compete at the highest levels. In order for that to happen the church will have to turn away from its traditional loyalty and be open to evolving in response to an evolving culture. That does not mean that the church has to compromise on its traditional core values and beliefs, what it means is that the methodology in how the church communicates its message and delivers its content will have to evolve and even be willing to lead. The church is too often the tail-light and not the head light when it comes to social issues. This was clearly an indictment on the church with how slow she is able to respond to evolution to social issues that rise up in the general public.

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[23] Matt Stefon, "Historically Black Colleges and Universities," Britannica, accessed April 30, 2019, https://www.britannica.com/topic/historically-black-colleges-and-universities.

In his book *Powernomics*, Dr. Claud Anderson argues that there are five floors that need to be addressed as black people in order to be able to compete in our society. The five floors are economics, politics, judicial system, media and education.[24] Dr. Anderson argues that the very first floor the must be addressed in the black community is economic, not racism. According to Anderson, economics is the driving force behind every major decision in America. On the foundation of economics everything was built in America, therefore, only on the foundation of economics can things be turned around in America. Dr. Anderson then suggest that as long as black people has a strong economic base then they will be able to purchase politicians, influence our court system, purchase and control more media outlets and lastly make use of the education that we already have as a people. According to Dr. Anderson, the reason why all those other factors are not advancing black people is because we have yet to establish and create a competitive economic base. Our economic power should not be wasted away by empowering other races while neglecting to empower our own race.[25]

Dr. Anderson characterizations of how poorly the black community is doing in America today can be harsh. However, there needs to be a systematic approach to address the problems in the black community. Clearly the issues we face as a people will not be solved overnight, especially since these problems have existed for centuries. Young people could be thought of as having abandoned the black church. That may be true because young people may believe that the black church has abandoned these specific economic issues that affect their everyday lives. When the black church was independent

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[24] Claud Anderson, *Powernomics: The Plan to Empower Black America* (Bethesda, MD: Powernomics Corporation of America, 2001), 31-40.

[25] Anderson, *Powernomics*, 31-40.

and was able to call out the injustices that happened to its people young people were engaged and supported in full force. That is when the church was able to shape various movements and organizations with a Christo-Centric outlook. The greatest example of that is the modern-day Civil Rights Movement in the twentieth century. Could it be that one of the current day challenges as to why young people do not participate in church as much is because the black church has abandoned those issues as a whole?

In this historical study we have learned that many of the struggles people face are still prevalent. At the same time, we have gained extraordinary victories along the way. Most, if not all, the victories that black people have enjoyed for its people came through the influence and organization of the black church. Many of our influential leaders were inspired and or trained through the black church. However, there seem to have been a shift in the focus of the church that can be traced the turn of the twenty first century. For the first time in our history, because of Faith Based Initiatives and Government Programming, the church seems to not be as vocal or involved in the advancement and betterment of our people as it is focused on staying in compliance to receive government funding.[26] The benefit of these programs has been the financial support of our churches and of the advancement of our ministerial leaders. Many Baby Boomer leaders of congregations have experienced more material and economic wealth than any other generation in our history. Whether right or wrong, the perception of that material wealth has driven this current generation of millennials to question the church and the God they are supposed to be promoting. It has caused others to leave the church as a whole and some to even leave the faith.

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[26] Marvin A. McMickle, *Preaching to the Black Middle Class: Words of Challenge, Words of Hope* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2000), 64.

The needed approach to take as a church is to return back to our roots and serve the people at the most fundamental level. We need to name the issues that our people are dealing with and be willing to attempt to address them. We do not need to take on the mantel that we will solve every issue, but we do bear the responsibility to attempt to address the issues with integrity and creativity. We need to go back to basics and start meeting our people at their area of need. We need to address personal and corporate economics, politics, judicial system, (social) media and education. Once the church starts acknowledging that this is where the majority of people live and aim to create a culture, rooted in Christology, that address how to better each of these areas of our lives, we will continue to lose this generation. However, on the other hand, if the church is committed to fight to speak to these issues and create the type of programming that will enhance these different areas, rather than stay addicted to solely spirituality, then we can attract this generation back to the church and build the type of organizations that will help turn the tide.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

A familiar challenge many modern-day churches are trying to address is how to evangelize to the millennial generation. This is not a new concept; every generation has had their own set of challenges trying to incorporate the upcoming generation into the culture of the already established church. However, one must admit that task is even more challenging today as the world has changed so drastically in the past two decades. Since the turn of the century, the internet and technology boom has totally transformed the world as we know it. The economic collapse and the great recession of 2008 had an effect on our country, and it has affected the lives of people who belong to the church. There has been the explosion of social media and the impact it had on all of our daily lives. Even the political landscape has made a dramatic shift. The entire American culture has been adjusted in the past twenty years and I believe all of these factors have to be taken into consideration when accessing the way this younger generation views church.

The millennial population and younger have only ever lived in a world that has been inundated with technology. From cellular phones to the internet, millennials have never been alive without the understanding or access to technology. They grew up with television, music videos and electronic mail. The institution of church needs to understand that when a young person walks through the doors of the sanctuary often times, they are walking into an antiquated world that they do not recognize. Church as a

whole seems to be the one institution that is typically behind with the times. Many churches value tradition, while at the same time are handcuffed by budget restrictions and or a leader who is uncomfortable with the prospect of technology; many churches are behind the times when it comes to how the rest of the world operates.[1] Many young people do not even carry cash on them because of the use of debit cards, online shopping and online merchant machines, so something as simple as passing the collection plate in church is one of many examples of younger people not being able to relate to the culture of church. "As surely as (Samuel) Proctor watched his children grow up in a world vastly different from the one in which he grew up, and yet offered them seasoned wisdom on how to be successful, the same process must be repeated today."[2]

However, regardless of how much of a generational divide there may seem to be in the church, young people will always be interested in an institution that is willing to meet them at their place of needs. We have seen in history many movements that involved active and passionate young people because the movement was willing to deal with the issues that young people were passionate about. These movements often times allowed young people to express themselves creatively and operate in a position of leadership. Therefore, many movements have thrived for a period of time in history while being led and pushed by a majority of young people. If the church can embrace that concept, then the church can still reach the upcoming generations. In order to do that, however, the church must be willing to understand that while they will always be able to stand firm on what they believe in; they will need to be willing to adjust and embrace

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[1] Marvin A. McMickle, *Preaching to the Black Middle Class: Words of Challenge, Words of Hope* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2000), 48.

[2] McMickle, *Preaching to the Black Middle Class,* 48.

some flexibility when it comes to how they convey those beliefs. The church will also have to be willing to embrace younger people and allow some to serve in leadership and allow others to express themselves creatively and in different nontraditional ways.

There are certainly ways to strike that balance. While it may be challenging and even a painful transition to implement it can certainly be done. Any type of change to the way some people understand what church should be is absolutely critical in order to attract a different generation to the institution we know as church. The church has to be mindful of the fact that this millennial generation fundamentally views church differently than generations of the past. First of all, the millennial generation, in large part, grew up with church being an option and not a necessity. There are various reasons for the that, chief of which being that millennials have grown up in single parent homes. Therefore, the enforcement of going to church on Sunday mornings was not as prevalent with a single parent household as it was with both parents being in the home. Part of the reason many millennials, particularly those of color, have grew up in single parent homes is because they were born around the time of the crack epidemic. The crack epidemic spread across this country and cause residual effects to an entire generation.[3] Either one parent was sick as a result of this epidemic, or they were in jail. Regardless, many single parent homes were generated as a result.

A change in American culture has certainly affected society in the twenty first century. There used to be a time where all stores were closed on Sundays because the assumption was Sunday was a day for church and time with family. However, the breakdown of the nuclear family unit along with the head of the households needing to

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[3] Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2010), 34.

work longer hours in order to make ends meet caused church on Sunday morning not to be as much of a priority. Another factor that contributes to the decline of the attendance of young people in church is the multiple options that are prevalent in our society. Now it is unheard of for certain stores to be closed on a Sunday. There are plenty of shopping options, recreation sports leagues for kids and adults, jobs, entertainment and professional sports, and the list can go on in regard to what someone can do on a Sunday. Church on a Sunday morning is now considered an afterthought. "If the church takes its role of being an instrument of transformation, reconciliation, and integration seriously, we would soon have a so-called social revival on our hands."[4] The church has the ability to affect culture in society in their respective community and the best way to begin that change is through the power of the preached word.

History has shown that young people will always be willing and motivated to fight for a cause the they are passionate about. Society witness that today with the young people who are protesting gun violence all around the country due to the rise in school shootings in recent years. Young people are now motivated to enter into politics and organize with the goal of making tangible change in their own community. If the church recognized and spoke to the issues that young people are facing, they would then become a more attractive option on Sunday morning. The church needs to delicately strike the balance of promoting spirituality and the core message of the gospel while at the same time using that message as the to view and address the challenges that faced in society. The church needs to embrace the reality that all throughout scripture there have been

[4] R. Drew Smith, William Ackah, and Anthony G. Reddie, *Churches, Blackness, and Contested Multiculturalism: Europe, Africa, and North America* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 150.

young and older people who have been called to do incredible and mighty things for the Kingdom.

Abraham, Noah and the Apostle Paul all had incredible and powerful ministries while they were up in age. However, David and Joseph and even Jesus the Christ were all used by God to transform history even while being, what we would consider today, a young adult. That reality should not be lost on the church as the church should be able to recognize and utilize the unique brilliance that young people can bring to the church and allow them to be in leadership. The youth and young adult should have a platform to utilize their creativity and express their passion. The older and wiser saints should encourage young people while at the same time be present in order to guide and teach rather than complain and criticize.

This chapter will explore the Black Power Movement as a way to highlight the is historical precedent of young people being passionate and willing to organize and get involved in social issues. Young people are willing to learn, grow, work and be involved so long as they do not feel as they are doing those things in vein. Further, when the church is willing to speak to the immediate needs of young people it will awaken their inner desire to get involved and work towards anything they can believe in and understand. The church loses the involvement of young adults when the church stubbornly embraces and promotes solely the theology of the afterlife and fails to address the here and now. While young people are struggling to pay bills, raise families, maintain health and enjoy their current existence, the church should always remember that a theology of eschatology should be balanced with a theology that addresses how faith can address and enhance how humanity lives today. This is critically important for a younger

generation who is desperately trying to figure out how to survive day by day with the expectation of wanting to a live a long and fruitful life.

Black Power Movement

The Black Power Movement was a movement that came to prominence in the second half of the twentieth century. A West-Indian born activist by the name of Stokely Carmichael was credited for originating the slogan, "Black Power" during a rally in Mississippi. While the slogan was coined during the 1960's, the theology of black power has been around much longer as it essentially refers to the uplifting and advancement of African Americans through economic and political power. The Black Power Movement was motivated by the growing sense of pride in African Americans understanding their own value and worth. "The rise of Black Power created a decisive turning point in black religious thought. Black Power forced black clergy to raise the theological question about the relation between black faith and white religion."[5] Despite the overwhelming challenges that African Americans faced in this country, they were resilient and determined enough to live in this country with a sense of pride. They would not be denied of their dignity and in order to ensure that they would embrace the phrase of "Black Power" even in the face of a white supremist political and economic system that prevailed in the country. This pride was manifested through various symbols of pride. Whether it was the Afro-centric hairstyle, or the African garments worn by many young blacks or by simply pumping a black fist in the air with pride; the concept of black power was alive and well during the 1960s.

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[5] James, H. Cone, *Speaking the Truth: Ecumenism, Liberation, and Black Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 105.

Black pride was also evidenced in student demands for curriculum that catered more to black studies by black teachers. Other slogans were promoted in conjunction with Black Power such as "Black is beautiful" credited to Harlem Renaissance poet Langston Hughes and "I'm Black and I'm proud" credited to the "Godfather of Soul," national recording artist James Brown. The ideology behind this movement was to uplift black people from the inside out. It was an effort to build the pride and self-esteem of black people and empower them to live with confidence and strength in the midst of a culture that was notorious for attempting to keep black people down and out. It did not matter whether it was through laws, the news media, job offers ect., the overall system seemed to go against black people in particular and this movement of black pride was a response to counter that notion.

In conjunction with Black Pride, the Black Power Movement also saw rise to black nationalism. "The nationalist perspective on the black struggle for freedom is deeply embedded in the history of black religious thought. Its prominent advocates include Bishop Henry McNeal turner of the AME Church; Marcus Garvey, the founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association; and Malcolm X of the religion of Islam."[6] Black nationalism is a political and social movement that began to thrive in the mid to late 1960s among African Americans in the United States and abroad. This movement is an offspring to the Universal Negro Improvement Association led by activist Marcus Garvey. This association was charged with building economic empowerment to the diaspora of black people all around the world. The ideology was to create unity and nation building within a particular race of people. "The most persuasive

[6] Cone, *Speaking the Truth,* 103.

interpreter of black nationalism during the 1960s was Malcolm X, who proclaimed a challenging critique of King's philosophy of integration, nonviolence and love."[7]

Stokely Carmichael remains an integral figure not only in the Civil Rights Movement but with the black power movement as well. Carmichael graduated with honors at Howard University and it was there where he learned the importance of political and economic power. After graduation, he went down to Alabama and involved himself with an African American voter registration drive. This drive was organized by an independent political party known as the Lowndes County Freedom Organization. This political organization chose to use the image of a black panther as their symbol. The imagery of this symbol was so powerful and well received that the organization later formed and became known as the Black Panther Party. The party would adopt the same emblem to represent them.

Black Panther Party

"The Black Panther Party was an organization that started in 1966 in Oakland, California as an effort to prevent the police brutality and murder of black people. It was also organized behind a range of other issues surrounding the black community such as health care, housing discrimination, employment and equality in the justice system."[8] The panthers would find out what the problems were in the community and attempt to solve them. For example, one major problem that was discovered in the black community was that young children were not performing well in their academic journey. The panthers

[7] Cone, *Speaking the Truth,* 105.

[8] "Black Panthers," History, accessed November 17, 2017, https://www.history.com/topics/civil-rights-movement/black-panthers.

quickly realized that the reason the children were not performing well in school was because they were very hungry. Many of the kids came from low income homes who could not afford the proper nutrition to be able to take care of some of the basic needs of their kids.

> The black panthers decided to partner with local grocery stores in the community and asked if they would be able to donate food to their organization in order to be able to provide breakfast for kids before school. The panthers were very successful in acquiring donated food items and eliciting volunteers to be able to cook and provide meals for the neighborhood kids, free of charge, before they went to school. The panthers organized this program all around the country where ever there was a chapter of the black panthers in order to make sure that African American children would be afforded free breakfast before school.[9]

Another challenge that was discovered in the black community was centered around the issue of health care. The black panthers realized that there were many people who could not afford regular checkups or screenings in these underserved black communities, so they decided to create a solution. Black people were poor and could not afford to go doctors, so the panthers went around to all the hospitals, medical schools and health clinics and attempted to organize a program to allow black residents an opportunity to have access to free health care screenings and checkups. They asked the doctors and medical students if they were willing to come to the black community and deal with these issues. Once again, the black panther party was very successful in getting these doctors and medical students to come and tend to the medical needs of the people. Therefore, all over the country the black panther party set up health clinics specifically designed to care for black residents who needed health care. Black people were able to get the proper care they needed for any sickness or even disease that they may have been exposed to. They

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[9] Garrett Albert Duncan, "Black Panther Party," Britannica, accessed November 17, 2017, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Black-Panther-Party.

were also given preventative treatments in order to stop any potential health risk before they would arise.

"The black panthers grew to have thousands of African American members in major urban areas around the country. The Black Panther Party whose original name was the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, original mission was to patrol African American neighborhoods to protect residents from acts of violence and targeting from police.""[10] However, the Panthers eventually grew into an organization that would do many other things to protect and develop African Americans. For example, the black panthers insisted that all African Americans arm themselves legally under the protection and guide of the Second Amendment. The panthers also demanded that African Americans be release from jail, exempt from the draft and receive reparations for hundreds of years of slavery and oppression.

The Black Panther Party was known for creating a Ten Point Program that African Americans should abide by. All of their demands and goals were articulated within the confines of their Ten Point Program. The Ten Point Program was created to articulate the official position of the Black Panther Party for various issues plaguing the African American Community, similar to the Universal Negro Improvement Association and the Nation of Islam. The goal was uniting African American people together and to make sure they were all working towards one common goal which was the empowerment and advancement of the entire race.

The Black Panther Party came into the national spotlight in May of 1967. The Black Panther Party thrust onto the national scene when a small portion of its fully armed

[10] Duncan, "Black Panther Party," accessed November 17, 2017, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Black-Panther-Party.

members marched into the state legislature of California in Sacramento. This portion of the Party was protesting against the pending Mulford Act. "The Mulford Act was a 1967 bill that revoked a law allowing citizens to publicly carry a loaded firearm."[11] The Black Panthers believed that this was a direct violation of their second amendment right and a direct attack on their organization. There were images of gun-toting Black Panthers entering the Capitol and as a direct result the Black Panther Party grew from a local organization into an international organization. There were forty-eight chapters in the states in North America along with support groups all around the world.

What is fascinating is that many of the items on the Ten Point Program that was implemented by the Black Panthers in the late 1960s and early 1970s is still relevant in America today a half a century later. Many of the issues that plagued the black community then are identical to the issues that plague our communities now. The suggestion is not to arm the deacons and the church mothers of the congregations and line the streets for self-defense. Rather, the argument is that the theology of black power or black pride has resonated with young people and generated a powerful movement that involved young people all around the country. The magnetism of the Black Power Movement was propelled by the thought of this movement speaking to the social ills and obvious disparities of this countries.[12] Young people felt heard and motivated to get involved to do something about their condition. Compare that to today and what society witness is that many churches are not addressing and dealing with the issues that are

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[11] Thad Morgan, "The NRA Supported Gun Control When the Black Panthers had the Weapons," History, accessed November 17, 2017, https://www.history.com/news/black-panthers-gun-control-nra-support-mulford-act.

[12] James H. Cone, *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church; Where Have we Been and Where are we Going?* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books Publishing, 1984), 77-91.

directly affecting the lives of young people and as a result young people do not feel heard, valued or motivated to go to church.

African Americans living in cities throughout North America continue to suffer economic and social inequality. There are still issues of poverty and lack of adequate social services in crowded urban areas. There are still poor living conditions, violence, low health standards, unemployment or under employment. These are the issues that the church should be willing and able to get involved with to try and address. These issues would attract young people to do the work of the church because it is the type of meaningful work that speak to their very living condition. Once a young person is involved, one has the opportunity to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and instill spirituality into their hearts and minds.

The Black Panther Party organization always sought to set itself apart from African American cultural nationalist organizations, such as the Universal Negro Improvement Association and the Nation of Islam. The Black Panther Party was always compared to these organizations, however, there were differences among them. "The Universal Negro Improvement Association was started and led by Marcus Garvey in the 1920s and their chief goal was for economic empowerment for all African descendants around the globe. They wanted to unify the diaspora by creating a universal economic network."[13] The Nation of Islam, otherwise known as the Black Muslim Movement, was a religious movement aimed at empowering black people through the practice of the religion of Islam. The honorable Elijah Muhammed found the organization with the purpose of African American unity. However, it was their powerful and charismatic

[13] "Marcus Garvey," History, accessed November 17, 2017, https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/marcus-garvey.

minister, Malcolm X, who propelled the movement onto the national and international stage. Malcolm X rose to prominence in the early 1960s and was known to be one of the leading voices in the black power movement. "However, unfortunately for Malcolm, while he was a leaving voice for black power, he broke with the Black Muslims or the Nation of Islam and that decision led to his untimely assassination in February of 1965."[14]

Although these various groups shared certain philosophical positions and tactical features, the Black Panther Party and cultural nationalists differed on a number of basic points. For example, African American cultural nationalists typically regarded all white people as oppressors, the Black Panther Party distinguished between those who they believed were racist white people and non-racist white people. The Black Panther Party was willing to work with and align themselves to those who they believed were non-racist whites in order to accomplish a common goal.

Another example is that cultural nationalists viewed all African Americans as oppressed however the Black Panther Party believed that African American had their share of elitist who exploited the capitalistic system and therefore those African Americans were capable of exploiting and oppressing others in their own race. Regardless, however of which faction of the black power movement one may have identified with, they all had a common agreement that the liberation of black people on multiple levels was the overall common goal. Therefore, I would argue that the overall black power movement was influenced and informed by black liberation theology.

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[14] "Malcolm X Assassinated," History, accessed November 17, 2017, https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/malcolm-x-assassinated.

Black Liberation Theology

Black liberation theology originated on July 31, 1966, when fifty-one black pastors bought a full-page ad in the *New York Times* and demanded a more aggressive approach to eradicating racism and bigotry in America. This movement was closely akin to the Black Power Movement; however, their main source of inspiration was found in the Bible. "Dwight Hopkins, a professor at the University of Chicago Divinity School, says black liberation theology often portrays Jesus as a brown-skinned revolutionary."[15] The Reverend James Hal Cone was an American theologian who promoted black theology and black liberation theology. He is known for the provocative book he wrote entitled, *Black Theology and Black Power*. In the book, "Cone argues against the white dominant theological paradigm. Cone champions a thought of how God identifies with black people in the United States and uses that premise to launch what we now know as black liberation theology. This theology and thought process was a hot topic across the country and around the world in seminaries and religious circles everywhere."[16]

Black liberation theology can be traced back to other ideologies of liberation such as the South American liberation theology. The South American Liberation theology was known to read the scripture in a way that would uplift humanity and assist the poor. Black liberation theology attempts to do the same thing, however, just placing a sharper lens of focus on African descendants in general and African Americans in particular. The general theme and premise of black liberation theology is to liberate and empower black

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[15] Barbara Bradley Hagerty, "A Closer Look at Black Liberation Theology," NPR, accessed November 17, 2017, https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=89236162.

[16] James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books Publishing, 1989), 102-121.

people from any form of injustice or bondage such as economic, political, social and even religious.[17] The goal of black liberation theology is to allow black people to find their own identity in Christianity. The criticism of Christianity is that it is a white man's religion. Another criticism is that the Apostle Paul traveled around Europe and, therefore, the New Testament comes from a Eurocentric approach. However, the black liberation theology aims to allow black people to read the scriptures with their unique journey in America as a cultural backdrop.

The uniqueness of the black man or woman's journey in America cannot be discounted or dismissed and black people should have an outlet to understand the sacred text of scripture with their unique experience taken into consideration. Black liberation theology attempts to focus Christianity on liberation of black people from social injustice in order to empower them to live here on earth, rather than place all their hopes and dreams in receiving a just reward in the afterlife. Many black people have moved away from the Christian faith and aligned their belief system to that of the Nation of Islam or have even taken up atheism mainly because they do not believe in waiting for their reward in the afterlife. It is hard for some black people to reconcile how white evangelical Christians can live on earth with a certain level of unchecked privileges and yet go to the same heaven as black people who have had to endure hell on earth. Therefore, what black liberation theology emphasizes is empowerment and liberation for the here and now. "Taking seriously the tradition of the Old and New Testaments and the

[17] Cone, *For My People,* 44-59.

past and present black revolution in America, black theology contends that the content of Christian theology is liberation."[18]

Black liberation theology does endure some criticism, however. Many theologians believe that Jesus taught a message about the kingdom not being here on earth but being in heaven. Therefore, to focus their focus on the racial, political and social injustices that black people have endured in this country, many critics site that black liberation theology tends to separate the black and white Christian communities. Unfortunately, that is a misunderstanding and misrepresentation of black liberation theology. Black liberation theology does not separate the black and white community, American culture separates the black and white communities. Black liberation theology simply calls out and speaks to this unfortunate reality and aims to empower black believers to grow in their faith in the midst of these harsh realities.[19] Black liberation theology aims to address the already harsh realities faced in culture. Remember, black liberation theology and the Black Power Movement came years after slavery ended. Therefore, the Black Power Movement and black liberation theology cannot be looked at as a cause to blame the social, economic and political divides between races in our country. Those divides and lop-sided systems had already been established for centuries before these movements ever came about. These movements were a response to these unjust systems that African Americans found themselves in.

One of the reasons young people have a hard time with coming and joining church today is because they feel a disconnect with navigating through their current lives

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[18] James H. Cone, *Risks of Faith: The Emergence of a Black Theology of Liberation, 1968-1998* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press Books, 1999), 32.

[19] Cone, *Risks of Faith,* 33.

and the gospel that is being preached on Sunday mornings. However, if the black church would commit to presenting black liberation theology, which was influenced by the Black Power Movement, it is believed that young people would be extremely attracted to church that is willing to meet them where they are and allow them to grow holistically in the midst of their challenging reality.

Conclusion

Black liberation theology reads the Bible through the experience of people who have suffered. Understanding black liberation theology will allow the growing believer to have a unique view in how they read scripture. This does not mean that they are entitled to misinterpret scripture, it means that they are empowered and liberated to understand scripture in a way that is relevant to them and their shared experience. Black liberation theology unlocks the mind of the reader to embrace that there are deeper meanings and deeper truths that can be erected from holy scripture. This understanding of scripture is able to empower and uplift an entire generation and even an entire race of people to do more for the kingdom of God than what they would have been able to do while constantly under oppression. Moses taught liberation. Jesus taught liberation. Paul taught liberation. Dr. Martin Luther King taught liberation theology. The Black Power Movement taught black people to be unashamedly black. "Jesus' consciousness was defined by his identity with the liberation of the weak and the helpless."[20] It is important to understand that Jesus Christ, and the Bible as a whole, speaks to the liberation of oppressed people. Black

[20] Cone, *Risks of Faith,* 115.

liberation theology specifies that oppression through the lens of the unique relationship that black people have with their experience here in America.

The movement stretched its tentacles to reach the religious community. There were plenty of black people who came out of the 1960's who understood as a result of this movement they did not have to be ashamed of being black or Christian. They grew to embrace Christianity while at the same time embracing their nationality and race. This sentiment is still needed and relevant today. Many young people are not coming to church because they believe they have to pick and choose. The choice seems to be between their race or their religion. There does not have to be that choice. Young people can embrace both if the church would be open to adopting this type of teaching and theology from their pulpits. Embrace the idea of creating programming that will evangelize to young people in a unique way. Evangelize to them by meeting them at their needs and empowering them to better themselves, not just spiritually and emotionally, but financially and politically. Teach them, through the lens of scripture, the importance of self-pride, self-worth, and self-esteem. There is no better way to encourage self-esteem than by offering pragmatic programming and solutions to position someone to be financially set free and politically connected.

There are so many examples of how the white supremist culture has infiltrated every way of life that many people are unaware of how prevalent it truly is in our culture. Yes, it has even infiltrated in the religious systems and belief. For example, there are stories of missionaries who would often times go over to Africa and try to convert people to Christ and in addition they would also try to convert them into western culture. Equating Jesus Christ and white American culture as synonymous. In doing so, they tried

to disregard the culture of Africa. This would send a subliminal message to the Africans that unless they sang the songs that white people sang, danced how white people danced, understood scripture the way white people understood it then they would not be able to receive the gospel. However, black liberation theology aimed to separate the gospel from one particular culture, namely white culture. Black liberation theology simply aims to receive the gospel with the understanding that God is able to affirm all cultures. Therefore, since America seems to insist on keeping black culture oppressed, black liberation theology intends to liberate, uplift and empower black culture. This can stretch into many ways of life such as the singing of songs, the preaching style, the way of dress. So, when missionaries would not allow the colleges and universities to teach and learn music that were created and sung primarily by black people, black people would sing their own music in their own universities.[21]

Using the theological approach of the Black Power Movement, which is directly aligned with black liberation theology, is a great evangelism tool to attract and motivate young people to be more involved with the church. The church should be willing and open to promoting a gospel that aims to balance the duality of uplifting and encouraging your black people and instilling pride in being exactly who you are while at the same time addressing the social ills and challenges you are facing for being who you are. African Americans should be proud of who they are but not blinded by the obstacles that come in the country for being African American. The church could be a great place to balance both those objectives. When church can become a safe haven for young African Americans to find their identity in Christ and who God has made them, but also equip

[21] Cone, *Speaking the Truth,* 105.

them to fight back against the injustices and oppression that they will undoubtedly face in American, the church will become an irresistible institution. Churches providing programming and tools to empower young people economically, politically as well as emotionally and spiritually will make it a very valuable and even an unrivaled institution for African Americans to be a part of. No other institution is uniquely positioned and equipped to speak to whole aspect of a man or woman such as the church. The church can address and empower a person in every aspect of their lives. They can be empowered mentally, emotionally, spiritually, financially and relationally. Once the church is willing to take that responsibility and begin to create programming that will address all areas of a person's existence, not just a spiritual approach, then the church will be better equipped to evangelize to young people and successfully bring that demographic back to the church.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

One way for the church to attract young adults back into the house of the Lord is by understanding who they are in order to better access their behavioral habits regarding their spirituality or lack thereof. One challenge the church is having with the young adult generation is trying to use traditional methods to attract young people which are no longer successful. These traditional methods may have been successful in the past, but this generation may now render them useless. The word of God will never change and should never be compromised, however, the delivery method to get the message across will often times need to be reevaluated. In order to be effective in reaching a younger generation, the church will need to be able to deliver a gospel message in a way that connects to the young person at the level of their understanding. In order to connect to them, the church will have to get to know them more intimately and not simply rely on traditional cookie cutter methodology that has been passed down from generation to generation.

This chapter will examine the reason why this generation of young adults differs from past generations in regard to their spirituality. The main difference is that this generation was born and grew up in a changing world, which has caused this generation to value and prioritize church differently than previous generations. "The rejection of Christianity by young blacks is not simply a nationalist phenomenon or simply an event

of the past. It is found today in many college and university settings. Many young black college students, especially on white campuses, dismiss Christianity and the Black Church on intellectual grounds."[1] Millennials are operating with a different set of principles and standards and therefore the church needs to be intentional about understanding these generational differences in order to reach them more effectively. More specifically the global economy will be explored that has impacted this generation in some uniquely challenging ways which has actually encouraged millennials to move away from church. Therefore, one area of opportunity for evangelism will be to attract millennials by equipping them with the financial literacy and tools to be better able to compete in the global economy.

Millennials, also knowns as Generation Y, are currently between the ages of seventeen and thirty-six and one of the first generations to spend their formative years growing up with the internet at their disposal. Millennials are the largest living generation as they account for a quarter of the population of the United States. Being that millennials are the first generations to spend their formative years online it makes sense that millennials are largest demographic to shop online. For most millennials online outlets offer more value and convince then traditional in store shopping. Millennials are also using subscription services to replace regular shopping trips to grocery stores and other bricks and mortars. During a UPS study of millennial shopping habits, only 11% of millennials reported they will make their next purchase in a physical retail store.[2]

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[1] James H. Cone, *Risks of Faith: The Emergence of a Black Theology of Liberation, 1968-1998* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press Books, 1999), 124.

[2] "45 Statistics on Millennial Spending Habits in 2019," Lexington Law, accessed October 25, 2018, https://www.lexingtonlaw.com/blog/credit-cards/millennial-spending-habits.html.

Millennials are not as concerned about name brand products as studies have shown they will purchase generic brand products in order to save. Forty percent of millennials refer to reviews and testimonials before making any purchases and that number increases when they are making purchases online.[3] This creates a real challenge for millennials as they have become known as a consumer generation. Many millennials suffer from unsecured debt. In addition, they also suffer from student load debt as well. Millennials are graduating from college with financial obligations and insurmountable debt and, therefore; there is a need for them to learn fiscal responsibility and gain better spending and saving habits.

The goal of this chapter is to study the reasoning behind the habits that are specific to millennials regarding financial literacy. The author will then attempt to bridge the gap of understanding regarding the financial tools and literacy that can be offered and link that to a spiritual appreciation that everything we have comes from God. Therefore, the Lord should be prioritized in life and not neglected. The goal is to draw young adults back into the church with the lure of equipping them in a critical area of need, which is their finances, and using that evangelical draw to grow them in Christ. In this chapter, the author will study generational theory along with social-economics in order to explain why this path of evangelism was chosen as a method to attract millennials back into the church. First, generational theory will be studied in order to understand what makes the millennial generation unique in their financial literacy as compared to other generations. That information will be critical to be able to form an evangelical strategy to reach this generation through addressing needs they may have in the area of their finances.

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[3] "45 Statistics on Millennial Spending Habits in 2019," Lexington Law, accessed October 25, 2018, https://www.lexingtonlaw.com/blog/credit-cards/millennial-spending-habits.html.

Generational Theory

The generational theory was created by William Strauss and Neil Howe. According to this theory recurring generational personas is associated with historical events and then used to predict future behavior. The theory is based on the work of William Strauss who was an American author and playwright. His partner was Neil Howe who was a historian and consultant. Even though there have been theories about cohorts of generations, Strauss and Howe are credited with having popularized the generational theory in the 1990s.[4] According to this theory, every eighty years is a crucial "fourth turning" of generations in American history. The "fourth turning" is necessarily marked by a crisis that has destroyed the social order and created a new one, after which a new cycle is created. The key is that very generation will have a turn in their behavior based on historical world events. Each turn last for about twenty to twenty-two years. Each turn represents a new era in which a new social, political, and economic climate exist. Each recurring cycle of age groups who represent a certain cycle will have specific patterns of behavior. These behavior patterns will be intertwined with historical events. Therefore, in theory we can better understand the millennial age group or generation based on the historical events that have occurred in their life span.[5]

According to their book *The Fourth Turning* by Neil Howe and William Strauss, American history follows a pattern of four reoccurring cycles otherwise known as

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[4] "Strauss-Howe Generational Theory: Summary of Movement," CenSAMM, accessed October 25, 2018, https://censamm.org/resources/profiles/strauss-howe-generational-theory.

[5] William Strauss and Neil Howe, *The Fourth Turning: An American Prophecy* (New York, NY: Three Rivers Press, 1997), 137-140.

turnings. Many modern societies follow these same patterns. The basic architecture of these cycles are as follows. The Crisis turning is known as the era of destruction. This turning comes as a result of war and therefore institutional life is destroyed. However, as this turning era ends, institutions will be rebuilt. Society will rediscover the benefits of being part of a collective, and community purpose will take precedence again. The High turning follows the crisis that ended the previous cycle. This period is typified by strong institutions and social collectivism, and weak individualism. The Unravelling turning is a period that is typified by weak institutions and broken down. The awakening is when we fixed the inner world and the crisis is when we fixed the outer world.[6]

The circulations of turning are an enduring feature of American history. In order of sequence the high era precedes the crisis era. During this era a great deal of effort is placed on keeping institutionalism strong and individualism suppressed. There is a great sense of public progress and do very well economically. The awakening is a period where people rebel against authority and want to find themselves again. People get tired of institutionalism, social conformity and social disciplines. People will want freedom for their own lives. This period is led by youth who are willing to challenge authority. There have been several instances in history which reflect this turning such as the puritan awakening, the first-grade awakening and even the second-grade awakening. The unraveling is the third turning. In this era institutions are weak and discredited. This is an era where individualism is encouraged. There seems to be a focus on cynicism and bad manners while people are pursuing their own interests. History teaches that unraveling eras always ultimately usher in the crisis era. Crisis era teaches that our outer world

[6] Strauss and Howe, *The Fourth Turning,* 124.

institutions, economic, political and legal, are turn down and rebuilt from the bottom up. Each of these eras in American history has become to be regarded as a new founded moment.[7]

Millennialism is a concept that can be associated with generational theory within the fourth turning. Millennialism fits within the cycle of turnings that eventually lead to crises that destroy the status quo. After this a rebuilding is necessary to create a new beginning. Strauss-Howe theory sees "fourth turnings" as challenging, but necessary stages. Though crisis is created national unity and a spirit of self-sacrifice for the greater good. If we are indeed in the crisis era it would mean that we first went through an awakening period and then an unraveling period to be able to get to the crisis era. Therefore, the good news for the church is that we should be preparing to come full circle and reach a high turning once again.

The millennial generation may have had an opportunity to rebel and exercise individualism in order to break down societal norms and institutional structures. However, history teaches that all of those broken-down structures will be rebuilt again. It is up to the church to continue to not get weary in well doing and understand that millennials will come back around and be willing to rebuild the sacred institutions that was once deconstructed! This is evident even in our political landscape. Many millennials are now entering into politics all over the country. In 2019 Congress is welcoming an enormous wave of young people to hold critical positions in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. There are millennials mayors, state representatives, and local officials rising up all over the country. This points to the rebuilding of social and

[7] Strauss and Howe, *The Fourth Turning,* 125.

political structures. Millennials are entering into the turning era where after there seemed to have been a crisis era, now they are turning into the high turning to reestablish the societal norms that this country has been built on.

A practical example of generational theory turnings is when we encounter a particular generation viewing a controversial issue differently than a previous generation viewed that same topic. A prime example of this is when European sociologist, Jacqueline Scott, wrote an article where she concluded that there has been a generational change in attitude towards abortion. Abortion, which is a very controversial topic, is a known to be a taboo subject among older Americans. Many people from the older generation, specifically conservative Americans, would identify themselves as pro-life, simply meaning they do not agree with the act of abrogation. However, according to her article, Scott argues that the younger generation, particularly liberal Americans, would identify themselves as pro-choice, which simply means they believe that the woman has the right to choose whether or not she is to have an abortion.

This can have a very profound effect of the theology that is preached from the pulpit. If one does not realize that there has been a generational shift to a fundamental theological understanding the church runs the risk of offending and alienating the millennial generation, simply because they are not able to relate. "The black church is the single most important institution in the black community. Beginning in the late eighteenth century and continuing to the present, it has been the oldest and most independent African-American organization."[8] The church cannot afford to alienate or abandon its younger generation. Millennials are looking to the church to be able speak to

[8] James H. Cone, *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church; Where Have we Been and Where are we Going?* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books Publishing, 1984), 99.

the changing landscape of society and offer hope and direction. This is not to suggest that the church should change their beliefs or traditions; what it suggests is that the church should be aware of the shift in generational principles and priorities and allow that awareness be used to adjust the delivery of the gospel message. Not in a way to compromise the message, but to present the message with empathy and an open mind to the possibility that some of the people the church is trying to reach does not agree with some of the theological foundational principles the church was always able to take for granted. This will open the door to a lot of teaching opportunities for the church to properly teach biblical principles while at the same time listen and learn why the younger generation may have a slightly different world view. That understanding will be critical in order to minister to that individual more effectively.

The Bible speaks about the importance of passing down from one generation to another the traditions and stories of what God has done for His people. In the Book of Judges, we learn that when Joshua died, he did so without appointing a successor. This ushered in the setting of the period of the Judges. At the age of 110 Joshua died and was buried at Timnath Heres traditionally identified with Tibneh, which was about eighteen miles north by northwest of Jerusalem. The new generation of Israelites that grew up after their faithful fathers died was known for its faithlessness toward the Lord. There was an entire generation who grew up after the death of Joshua and turned away from the Lord. They did not know the Lord. The fact that they did not know the Lord, nor did they acknowledge what the Lord had done for Israel was an indictment of the previous generation's ability to prepare the next generation to acknowledge and serve the Lord. They rejected both the Lord's grace toward them and their responsibilities toward Him.

This led to the idolatrous practices cited in the verses that follow. The Bible is clear that the previous generation needs to teach and train the next generation about the goodness of the Lord. The Bible declares that we should "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6). As long as we train a child to know the Lord, they will have direction and purpose for their lives. This is the charge to the church, to not abandon the millennial generation, but instead reach out to them and train them in the way of the Lord.

In the 145th Psalm, David talks about the great works that the Lord has done. David was convinced that the Lord his God was worthy of honor and because of that he believed that the goodness of God should be declared from generation to generation. David suggests that these great acts should be spoken about, written about, sung and remembered and then passed down to the children. It is critical for the Christian believer that every generation declares to the next generation that God has done great things in their lives. It is the desire of God that the older generation teach the newer generation to read, trust and obey Him. This Psalm not only speaks about the imparting of truth from one generation to another, it also speaks of a certain kind of imparting. It is an imparting with exultation. It says, "One generation shall praise Your works to another and declare your mighty acts" (Ps. 145:4). In order to do that parents must educate their children. This is a foundational principle to ministry. Parents must educate their children in order to tell the next generation about God. The challenge with millennials is that many of them have grown up without a parent. Many millennials have grown up in single parent homes, foster care, raised by grandparents or some other type of challenge. Therefore, many millennials are products of a living situation where the previous generation did not teach

them to understand the mighty works of God or to praise and declare of those great works.

The church needs to understand this dynamic and fill in the gap. The church will need to be even more diligent to educate a generation of millennials, many of whom did not grow up learning or hearing about the greatness of God. "Another way of noting the rejection of black Christianity and the Black Church is to notice their absence in most Black Studies programs."[9] Many young adults, especially black millennials, are not growing up learning about or having the desire or opportunities to learn about the gospel of Jesus Christ. Therefore, in order to get their attention now it may be challenging to speak about a God who Millennials are not familiar with. However, if the church can be creative and speak to issues that millennials are familiar with, such as trying to make ends meet, get out of debt, pay their bills and grow financially secure, then the church will be able to use that opportunity to introduce them to a God who is able to provide for their needs. When children grow up and become adults, they continue to learn and grow.

Therefore, when they move toward parenting and teaching children, they must continue to be taught and shaped biblically in order that they may be equipped to train up their children. This natural cycle of life presents the church with an awesome opportunity. Now that millennials are at the age where they are typically getting married and having children, even though they may not have grown up in the church, they may be willing to reenter the institution of church for the sake of their kids. Most parents want to set a great example for their kids and in order to do that they must be taught as well. If the church is able to provide a safe haven for young adults to be able to grow themselves

[9] Cone, *Risks of Faith,* 124.

into a position where they can be a stronger and better parent to their kids they would be attracted to that proposition.

The Strauss-Howe generational theory can be utilized as a useful tool to help navigate the turns that are anticipated to occur over the next fifty years. According to Strauss and Howe, millennials have garnered a "hero" complex based on the impact of history they experienced in their lifetime. Several factors such as what year they were born, what year their parents were born, and how we are personally affected by the historical events during our lifespan contribute to someone's personality, traits, belief system and habits. All of these things can vary from one generation to another. Based on Strauss-Howe's theory of generational cycles which suggests that every fifteen to twenty years can be categorized into a particular phase of turning. There are four turnings which will result in a lifespan of sixty to eighty years to when the entire cycle will repeat itself.

According to this theory, the church needs to be willing to adjust their ministry goals, objectives and approaches every fifteen to twenty years. Even within that adjustment, the church needs to be willing and able to understand that each generation in the church is changing and evolving as well. So, in order to effectively minister to each generation, particularly the millennial generation, the church needs to be aware of both the generational cycle they are currently in as well as which generation the church is dealing with because each generation had to endure different experiences based on what part of American history they were exposed. The millennial generation was exposed to the Iraq war, the technology boom, the internet age, the crack era, prison industrial complex era, and because of these unique factors in American history, millennials have a different approach and understanding of life than the baby boomers do.

Socioeconomics

Naturally the field of study to explore in this chapter is the field of socioeconomics. Social economics is the social science that studies how economic activity affects and is shaped by social processes. Social economics can analyze how societies will advance. Social economics can also evaluate whether or not a society will regress or stagnate based on their economic status. We can evaluate social economics on several levels. We can evaluate social economics through the scope of the economy or through the lens of society. In regard to the economy, social economics can be measured through the lens of the global economy, state, regional or even local economy. When referring to a particular society the reference is pointing to a social, economic or even a cultural group.

The society will be measured based on how that society is doing in regard to their economic status anywhere from a local level up to a global level. The society measured in this chapter will be the millennial group. The author will explore the reasonings behind their place in the economy. It is important to understand the reasoning for several factors that can play into their economic status. The first factors will be their spending habits. Secondly, gaining a better understanding on how they have developed their value system in regard to finances. Lastly, determining whether or not they have inherited generational wealth and whether they will be in position to pass down generational wealth. This study will get into the realm of behavioral economics as well. Behavioral economics explores various factors that contribute to economic decision making such as emotional, cultural

and social influences. Behavioral models typically integrate insights from psychology, neuroscience and microeconomic theory.

The millennial generation have been studied extensively in regard to their effect on the global economy. Since there are so many millennials living they have a profound effect on many different factors that contribute to the economy. From buying houses, to obtaining credit, to starting businesses, you cannot measure the correct economic landscape in the country and around the world without including Millennial behavior. Of course, there is no generation that behaves exactly the same as a previous generation, but there can be some similarities or trends that help predict future behavior. However, as the economy has changed over the years it effects how this particular generation will value money and spending. Therefore, this generation will face unique challenges as well as opportunities because of these differences. Below are some statistics regarding how millennials effect the economy.

According to *Forbes Magazine,* millennials as a whole believe it is important to give back to the community and expect that corporate brands should do the same.[10] This is an important revelation for churches to understand about the mainframe of millennials. For a church to raise money, they will need to understand that millennials will want to know where the money is going and the cause the church is championing. This will allow the church to have more success when trying to raise money for their organization. The previous generation was willing to give their tithes and offerings just because the pastor taught it and the Bible required it. While there still may be that precedent in regard to

[10] Jeff Fromm, "Millennials Are Influencing the Future of Philanthropy," Forbes, accessed April 12, 2018, https://www.forbes.com/sites/jefffromm/2017/02/25/millennials-are-influencing-the-future-of-philanthropy/#9828a7c78f91.

millennials, more and more millennials are looking to be informed about what the church is doing with the money and, more importantly, what community outreach or cause will the church contribute to.

Another statistic states that millennials prefer to have better experiences as opposed to better products. Therefore, they will heavily weigh a brands customer experience into their perception of a brand. Seventy-four percent of millennials report that they will switch to a different retailer or brand if they have a negative experience.[11] This is a stark difference to how the previous generation would approach shopping. The parents of millennials are known to expect brands to provide value for their money along with proper customer service. However, they believe more in brand loyalty and are willing to work through a problematic experience. Understanding this behavior can give a church insight on how millennials approach church. Millennials are looking for a good experience. This means they will shop around for a different church to find one who has given them the experience they were looking for. This is starkly different from the previous generation who believe they should be loyal to their church for a lifetime regardless of who the pastor was or what type of challenge they may have faced in that church. Seventy-four percent of millennials would switch to a different retailer or brand if they had a negative customer service experience.[12]

Another trait of millennials, according to American Express, is that 67% of millennials believe they have a responsibility to share feedback with a brand about their

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[11] Melanie Curtin, "73 Percent of Millennials are Willing to Spend More Money on This One Type of Product," accessed April 12, 2018, https://www.inc.com/melanie-curtin/73-percent-of-millennials-are-willing-to-spend-more-money-on-this-1-type-of-product.html.

[12] Kimberly Palmer, "How Credit Card Issuers Pursue the Wary Millennials" accessed March 28, 2019, https://www.nerdwallet.com/blog/credit-cards/credit-card-issuers-pursue-millennials/.

experience.[13] Millennials are more likely to share positive customer service experiences than negative ones. This is probably because millennials understand the importance and significance of online shopping. So, they understand that there is a high probability that another shopper will read their online review and therefore sharing their experience with that company becomes a personal responsibility. This mentality and behavior pattern are similar regarding church. Millennials will share the experience they have when they walk into the doors of the church. So, if a local church is trying to attract young people that church needs to understand that word of mouth becomes a powerful tool in recruitment. If one young person has a great experience in regard to being greeted by the ushers, enjoying the music, being inspired by the preached word, they will be more likely to invite their peers. This is a much more impactful way to attract young adults as opposed to spending all of the church's resources in marketing and advertising.

In regard to advertisements and marketing millennials can be very responsive to advertising if they believe it is relevant. As millennials prefer online entertainment over traditional cable or television, advertising to the demographic has adapted to become more specific. With the power of online advertising and history tracking targeting users by age, gender and other demographics is possible. Although it is easier to reach millennials online only 6% believe that online advertising is credible. According to the company Eventbrite, 75% of millennials believe attending an event in person has more impact than acting online.[14] So, while having a social media presence, a modern and up to

[13] Palmer, "How Credit Card Issuers Pursue the Wary Millennials," accessed March 28, 2019, https://www.nerdwallet.com/blog/credit-cards/credit-card-issuers-pursue-millennials/.

[14] "Millennials: Fueling the Experience Economy," Eventbrite, accessed April 12, 2018, https://www.eventbrite.com/blog/academy/millennials-fueling-experience-economy/.

date website and an interactive video ministry may seem critically important, these behavior patterns suggest that the experience that millennials have at the church will be the deciding factor on whether or not they will become active in that ministry.

When it comes to debt, millennials are heavily burdened with debt from student loans, credit cards and other lending sources. Many millennials had to borrow large sums of money to pay for education. According to the census bureau, it is estimated that millennials carry over one trillion in student loans.[15] This large debt has a large impact on millennials as home ownership is down among the demographic and over 52% are concerned about defaulting on their loans over the next twelve months.[16] Sixty-three percent of millennials have more than $10,000 in student debt. Fifty-two percent of millennials carry over balances on their credit cards every month. Forty-one percent of millennials are delaying owning a home because of debt. Forty-nine percent of millennials do not have a retirement account.[17] These statistics are absolutely alarming, but they are also absolutely critical for the church to understand the burdens that this young generation is carrying each and every time they walk into the church. If the church is not addressing these areas of concern then they will miss a golden opportunity to reach a generation that is longing to have the same opportunities, success and security as the previous generation.

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[15] Alexi Tanzi, "Millennials Face $1Trillion Debt as Student Loans Pile Up," Fortune Magazine, accessed March 5, 2018, http://fortune.com/2019/02/25/millennials-student-loans-debt/.

[16] "15 Economic Facts About Millennials," Obama White House, accessed March 5, 2018, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/millennials_report.pdf.

[17] Adam Forrest, "Millennials are Missing Out on Life Because They Have More Debt Than Savings," Vice, accessed April 15, 2018, https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/wj7zen/millennials-are-missing-out-on-life-because-they-have-more-debt-than-savings-vgtrn.

Conclusion

Strauss-Howe generational theory has informed us that there are different generational types based on what they have experienced. Generations who have experienced similar early-life experiences often develop similar collective personas and they will follow similar life-trajectories. Strauss and Howe discovered a pattern in the way different types of generations follow one another in time. They identified four generational archetypes. They are known as the Prophet, Nomad, Hero, and Artist.[18] They believed that these archetypes have recurred in that order throughout American history. The generations in each archetype have similar age, grew up in a similar area and as a result they share some basic attitudes towards family, risk, culture and values, society and finances. Throughout modern history, the four generational archetypes have followed one another in a recurring cycle.

The Prophet generations were born after a great war or other crisis, during a time of rejuvenated community life and consensus around a new societal order. The Prophets are linked to the baby boomer generation. The Nomad generations are born during a spiritual awakening, a time of social ideals and spiritual agendas when youth-fired attacks break out against the established institutional order. The Nomads are linked to Generation X. The Hero generations are born after a spiritual awakening, during a time of individual pragmatism, self-reliance. This generation is most closely linked to millennials. Lastly, the Artist generations are born during a great war or other historical crisis. There are reasons why the cycle of archetypes recurs and that is because each youth generation tries

[18] John Mauldin, "Millennials are Doomed to Face an Existential Crisis that will Define the Rest of Their Lives," Forbes, accessed April 12, 2018, https://www.forbes.com/sites/johnmauldin/2016/06/24/millennials-are-doomed-to-face-an-existential-crisis-that-will-define-the-rest-of-their-lives/#6a78feb575b0.

to correct or compensate for what it perceives as the problems that came from the previous generation. For example, it should not be surprising that boomers (a prophet generation, focused on values, individualism, and inner-life) have given birth to millennials (a hero generation, focused on actions, community, and institutional life). According to Stauss-Howe, an archetype will never produce an archetype like themselves. They will only produce an opposing archetype. Therefore, a generation is not like the generation that shaped you, instead it is like the generation that shaped the generation that shaped you.[19]

Therefore, understanding these various generational theories should enable the church to be better equipped to minister to a new generation coming into the church. The challenge that the church is facing today is that there are many baby boomers in leadership trying to minister to millennials the way they were groomed in the church. However, according to this generational theory there should be some subtle changes and adjustments churches are willing to make in order to more effectively reach this next generation coming up in the church. Archetypes are an important part of the predictive power of the Strauss-Howe generational theory. By looking at how previous generations of the same archetype evolved, it is possible to make forecasts about how the next generations will behave. By understanding generations, it is possible to see around these "corners" and correctly predict an entirely new behavioral and attitudinal direction.

It is important for the church to understand the social economic dynamic that the millennial generation faces. In order for the church to effectively evangelize to

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[19] Mauldin, "Millennials are Doomed to Face an Existential Crisis," accessed April 12, 2018, https://www.forbes.com/sites/johnmauldin/2016/06/24/millennials-are-doomed-to-face-an-existential-crisis-that-will-define-the-rest-of-their-lives/#6a78feb575b0.

millennials, the church must not be silent about the economic challenges facing the young adult generation. They face crippling student loan and credit card debt. They are not able to purchase a home because of it and in many cases their financial challenges seep into their relationships. The church has an opportunity to become relevant for many millennials who are facing these types of economic challenges. The church can both speak to and offer programming and tools that educate and equip young people to do better in the area of their finances. Many millennials were not required to go to church every Sunday in comparison to the baby boomer generation and because of that millennials are often times biblically illiterate. The church is in a position to be able to teach biblical truths and principles while at the same time addressing a real need, which would be a powerful draw bringing the young adult population back into the church.

In this project the author will attempt to evangelize to young adults by offering a preaching series that will encourage the enhancement of the financial situation for participating young adults. This project will offer financial literacy enlightenment aimed at encouraging higher quality financial decisions. The goal will be to encourage better spending habits, reduction of debt along with savings and investment courses. This programming will be used as a way to draw in young adults to the church. The goal is to use these programming courses to instill godly teaching and principles and to introduce Christ.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Introduction

Preaching the word of God is the lifeblood of the African American Church. Each and every Sunday morning people flood churches all over the country with great expectation to hear a sermon that is rooted in the word of God. Dr. William Watley, Senior Pastor of St. Phillip AME Church in Atlanta, Georgia made a profound statement regarding the power and influence of preaching in the black church during our January Intensive. Dr. William Watley suggested "If you want your church to follow your vision present it to them in a preaching series." That statement was incredibly profound for me because what it suggested to me was that the Sunday morning sermon has significant influence on church goers. This also meant to me that a sermon could have a positive or negative influence on those who come to hear the word.

While wrestling with the burning question of why millennials are not attending church or why they are leaving the church in so many of our congregations around the country, I realized that the preached word each Sunday must be considered. Could it be that the word young people are hearing in our churches are not speaking to their immediate needs and desires? On the flip side, if there was a preacher who was willing to understand the world that Millennials are currently living in, could it be that preaching aimed to speak to where they are would attract more millennials? This is where I realized

that having a preaching series that spoke to the practical needs of young adults in today's society may very well be a solution to drawing young people back to church.

What is the true reason why young people do not attend church? Is the answer rooted in the notion that this generation does not respect religious institutions like previous generations? Or is the answer based on a generational divide? Could it be that young people do not feel included, welcomed or even comfortable in church now a days? Could it be that young people do not feel like that they are able to get any practical benefit from the church? Therefore, I concluded that if I was able to preach a pragmatic sermon series that spoke to the direct needs specific to a younger generation than potentially, they would be drawn to a pragmatic preached word which could lead to pragmatic community programming.

If you are a Millennial and you have followed the traditional path to success, there is a good chance you are facing various financial challenges. There are rising cost of living, rising cost of education, increased competition for jobs but at the same time wages are not rising at the same pace. This has led to a Millennial generation that has student loan debt greater than any previous generation. They also are the first generation to inherent less wealth or to earn lower wages than their parents when the cost of living and inflation are taken into account. Millennials are forced to wait longer to get married, afford a house, afford a car and start a family. They are also spending more time working as they have to pick up a second job just to make ends meet. Could it be that these stressors have led to a decline in a generation's spirituality? Practically speaking, it seems like Millennials just do not have the time and energy to spend their Sunday's at church when they have to work multiple jobs. Sundays are now the only day where errands can

be run or when sporting events for the kids can be attended. Not only is there a time challenge, but there is also the challenge of actually contributing to a spiritual organization as well.

Millennials are hindered by a society that has radically changed in the past twenty years. There seems to be a steep generational gap. The Baby Boom generation and older have trouble connecting to the Millennial Generation and younger. I believe it is because the older generation has not fully come to grips to how vastly the world has changed in the past twenty years. Not only has technology radically transformed the world, but the economic disparity between the haves and the have nots have widened as well. Unfortunately, this is disproportionately true in the black community. Studies have proven that the black community are usually affected disproportionately worse than every other ethnic group when it comes to the wealth gap.

Democratic Candidate, Andrew Yang, mentioned in the 2020 Presidential Primary Debate that one of the reasons there are not a lot of candidates of color is because in order for people to support candidates who represent their interests, they would need disposable income. The wealth gap in the black community is so wide that most African Americans do not have the extra financial capital to donate to political campaigns nor do they have the financial capital to give to their local church. I believe this financial stress has caused a challenge for black families to support their local churches. This dynamic can lead to residual effects because underfunded churches are not able to provide the community programming or services that would attract black families.

The goal of this project was to name these challenges from the pulpit and shed light to what, I believed, could be the root causes to the lack of attendance in our

churches. When people have more, they will give more. However, when people do not have, they will not be able to give. Also, when people do not have, they will do what is necessary to try and gain more wealth. So young people and women in particular find themselves spending more time at work, working multiple jobs, or even obtaining higher education all in an effort to work their way out of poverty. Since there is only twenty-four hours in a day, the increase time spent on working and school has eliminated the amount of time previous generations used to spend in church and focusing on their spirituality. The focus of this project was to test the hypothesis that if we would acknowledge these financial struggles from the pulpit and preach a tangible and financially practical word with the hopes of creating pragmatic programming that would address these challenges, that would then draw the Millennial Generation back to the church.

Methodology

Preaching will be the means that I use to gather the data for this project. I did a six-week sermon series aimed specifically at financial principles. I preached the first sermon on Sunday October 6th, 2019 and preached for six consecutive Sundays from that day forth. I chose to do a preaching series because the preached word and sermon in the African American church holds the most significance and influence. This was the most effective way to ensure that I was able to preach and teach about the financial principles; I believe are pertinent to the young adult life. Also, the sermon series aimed to be evangelistic, so I am encouraging my young adults to invite friends, family, co-workers and associates to come to church and participate in this particular sermon series. Preaching is an extremely powerful way of communicating. There are several ways the

parishioners receive the preached word. Often times in the African American context the preached word is received as if it is the voice of God himself communicating to you. This is a powerful interpretation of the sermon and can cause the motivation to make certain lifestyle changes as a way to responding to God. Another interpretation of the preached word is to receive it as the Holy Spirit speaking through the man or woman of God who preaches the word. Once again, this holds a high level of regard to the parishioner who hears the word because they interpret the sermon as a dialog between them and God. Lastly, the parishioner may receive the sermon as simply a man or a woman preaching the Bible through their personal lens of interpretation. While this view point of the sermon does not hold as much reverence as it would to the parishioner who believes they are communicating with God through the sermon, it still holds a very influential tone and will cause the parishioner to, at the very least, challenge the way they listen to and understand the message against biblical witness.

Before and after I preached the six-week sermon series I identified a group of young adults who were willing to participate in the research. I chose twenty-five young adults who were willing to take part in this study. They ranged from the ages eighteen to forty years old; and they each had some connection to the church. I started out with a pre survey which I had each of them fill out on the first Sunday I preached the first sermon. They each filled out and handed in the pre survey by Sunday October 6th. On the last Sunday of the sermon series, I had the same twenty-five people fill out the post survey. They completed that survey on Sunday November 10, 2019. Thankfully, everyone who filled out the pre survey was able and willing to listen to all the sermons and fill out the post survey. Within that group of twenty-five young adults, I identified five people who I

sat down with on a one-on-one basis to do individual interviews. The interviews were used a means to gather additional information and to allow these individuals to expand on their interpretation of the sermon series beyond what the surveys could convey. Lastly, I identified ten young adults, different from the five who I interviewed one-on-one but within the twenty-five who took the surveys, and I asked these ten individuals to all sit down together and answer some follow up questions in a focus group setting. I used these three triangulation methods to gather all of my data and conduct the research needed to prove the original hypothesis to this project.

Implementation

Sermon Number One

The first sermon of the sermon series was entitled "Dealing with debt." I preached this sermon on Sunday morning, October 6, 2019. The scriptural reference was Luke 16:1-10. The average American now has about $38,000 in personal debt; this does not include home mortgages. That is up over $1,000 from a year ago, according to Northwestern Mutual's 2018 Planning and Progress Study, which also reports that "fewer people said they carry 'no debt' this year compared to the previous year."[1]

Generation Z and younger millennials (ages eighteen through twenty-four) carry on average $22,000. Older millennials (ages twenty-five through thirty-four) carry on average $42,000. Generation X (ages thirty-five through forty-nine) carry on average $39,000. Baby boomers (age fifty plus) carry on average $36,000. Keep in mind that these studies do not reflect the condition of black America. Typically, whenever we are

[1] "2018 Planning and Progress Study," Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Company, accessed December 19, 2019, https://news.northwesternmutual.com/planning-and-progress-2018.

dealing with national statistics, we take into account that the numbers are almost always proportionately worse for those of us in the black community. We suffer from higher levels of debt, we suffer from higher numbers regarding unemployment, we suffer from more drastic distances in regard to wage gaps, and it even seeps into suffering more when it comes to health and disease related statistics.

In regard to the debt crisis in America, while each generation are dealing with debt please understand that all debt is not created equal. There seems to be an ascending pattern when it comes to debt. If you are fortunate to get a higher education the first kind of debt you will most likely acquire are student loans, which is why Generation Z and younger millennials are dealing with primarily student loan debt. However, as you age you go from having student loan debt to acquiring credit card debt, personal loan debt and maybe even a car loan. The seemingly natural societal progression is that when you finish school you will want to start your new life however; most people face an all too common problem. The problem is that the job you receive after gaining all that education (if you're lucky enough to get a job at all) that job will more than likely pay you less than you need to deal with the cost of living. Simultaneously, you will need to acquire some level of personal consumer debt just to be able to survive.

Young people are maxing out credit cards and taking out personal loans just to be able to pay the bills. Young people are excited to get a new job but as soon as they get a new job; they realize they may need some level of transportation in order to get to the job that pays them. So, now they have just acquired a car loan, on top of the personal loan or credit card or student loan debt that they already have. They did not even purchase a house yet. So, while the older generation may have debt limited to a mortgage that they

are poised to pay off, the younger generations are dealing with several levels of debt before they could ever think of purchasing a home.

This sermon was aimed specifically about calling out the debt crisis in an attempt to identify with young people and to let them know they are not alone. There is power in first naming the problem from the pulpit. Afterwards, later in this series and in even in this sermon specifically, I laid out practical solutions on how to tackle and handle debt crisis. In this sermon, I used the parable of the shrewd manager taught by Jesus in the gospel according to Luke as my scripture reference. In this parable, Jesus teaches about a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. The rich man called the manager in to give account of his management of the rich man's money. The manager decided to come up with a shrewd plan to be able to get out of the predicament he was in with the rich man. He came up with a plan to reduce the debt of each of his master's debtors in order to gain favor with them. The rich man actually commended the manager for acting shrewdly and coming up with a plan to deal with his predicament.

I used this theological premise to preach a message to encourage people to address and face financial situations head on. People need to stop hiding and running from exactly where they are financially. Instead, we as a people need to have the courage to deal with exactly where we are financially in order to create a plan to advance and thrive. After we address where we are financially, we then need to come up with a shrewd plan of attack to totally eliminate and eradicate debt. In this sermon, I expand and teach practical financial principles.

Sermon Number Two

The second sermon of the sermon series was entitled "Count the Cost." I preached this sermon on Sunday morning, October 13, 2019. The scriptural reference was Luke 14:25-29. In this sermon I preached about the importance and power of financial planning. In the gospel according to Luke, chapter fourteen, Jesus taught a principle about counting the cost of building a tower. In verse twenty-nine, he says 'For if you lay the foundation and you are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying, "This person began to build what he could not finish."' Jesus is teaching about the importance of planning. I expand on his thought to teach some practical preaching on financial planning. Financial planning is a critically important tool that we must use in order to set ourselves up for success. Many people are unfortunately living paycheck to paycheck and it causes major stress and frustration. However, if we are taught better financial planning habits, we can do a better job of setting ourselves up for success in the future.

In this sermon, I detail practical ways that we can rethink how we use our money. My premise is that we would not get so caught up with frivolous spending if we had a better understanding of how a financial plan can assist in reaching a designated goal. No matter what it is we may desire to have, if we are willing to put a plan together and disciplined enough to see it through, we will be able to achieve that particular goal. If we are willing to put a certain amount of money away each and every week, or each and every month, we could build the financial capital necessary to purchase the items we believe we need in our lives. In building on the sermon preached the previous week, if we are willing to put a certain amount of money aside each and every month we could

eradicate debt and free ourselves up to make financially independent decisions moving forward.

Another practical principle I taught from this sermon was the importance of budgeting money. There are several important and practical blessings from being able to budget money. First and foremost, budgeting your money will make you keenly aware of what is going on with your money. Budgeting will force you to take account of the amount of money coming in and the amount of money going out. Being aware of what is going on with your money tends to make a person more appreciative and in turn will keep a person from spending frivolously.

Many financial problems in our community is not a result of financial lack, but mismanagement of funds. We tend to overspend on items we do not need and not properly plan for the future. Budgeting is an excellent financial planning tool to position us for the future. Budgeting money will help us stay organized and have complete control over our financial situation. Budgeting will also give a clear picture of what we can plan for and allow for us to stay focused on our money goals. Another aspect of financial planning is potential danger that might be ahead of us. Budgeting will allow us to prepare for any unexpected cost or give us warning signs of any potential problems that may be down the road. Having a financial plan will give us the confidence the security to be better positioned financially for the future.

Sermon Number Three

The third sermon of the sermon series I preached was entitled "Secret of Contentment." I preached this sermon on Sunday morning, October 20, 2019. The

scriptural reference was Philippians 4:10-13. This sermon was designed to highlight the key to being content with what we have. Many of us fall in the trap of always desiring and craving more than we need. We live in a capitalistic society that has brainwashed us to never be satisfied or content with what God has already blessed us with. Instead we are pressured to desire more than we need. This insatiable quest for more leads to high levels of disappointments, dissatisfaction and even depression.

In this sermon I preach that it appears that Paul wrote this letter as both a thank-you note and as a word of greeting and exhortation. The Apostle Paul testifies that God does supply the needs of His people. Paul's heart was made glad (he said, I rejoice greatly in the Lord) because of the continued interest the Philippian Christians showed in him. They had not forgotten him; and Paul understands that it was through them that God had met all of his needs. Paul did not beg God's people to help him in his work. He did however, place his need before the people because Paul understood that God would meet his needs. However, no matter what the outcome he was content!

Paul had learned the lesson of contentment. Paul learned that when you follow God circumstances are bound to change. One day you will be up, the next day you will be down, but it does not matter because God will be with you through it all! Changing circumstances should not affect your inner contentment or your inner joy. At times, Paul experienced definite financial and material needs, and at other times he had an overflow of abundance. He learned how to cope with both need and with plenty. Paul said he could do everything—including handling poverty and or living in abundance—because he was in relationship with Jesus Christ, the one who gave him strength.

This was not an expression of pride in his own abilities, but a declaration of the strength provided by Christ. Since these people had already helped him so much, Paul did not want them to think he was still looking for more from them. He had received from the Philippians full payment, all the money they had sent, so he was then abounding and was amply supplied.

Sermon Number Four

The fourth sermon of the sermon series I preached was entitled "Gaining It All Back." I preached this sermon on Sunday morning, October 27, 2019. The scriptural reference was Luke 15:11-21. This sermon was preached using the parable of the prodigal son. Jesus taught about a son who had it all. The son gained an inheritance from his father but rather than spend his money, his time and his resources wisely, he traveled out to a far country and spent all that he had in wild living. I preached this message from the perspective of how to handle losing what you had and starting all over.

This messaged was hinged on verse seventeen. This verse states that the son came to his senses. Once the son came to his senses, he was able to reevaluate his life and change his decision making. He took a humble approach to retrace his steps and go back to his father's house. This time he vowed to appreciate whatever he had and make better decisions to keep it and grow from it.

Many times, the reason we are in bad predicaments, financially, is because we make poor financial choices. I wanted to preach a sermon that highlights the fact that we are responsible for the choices we make. Often times, we are exactly where we are in life based on the decisions we made in the past. This means if we are willing to make better

decisions with what we do with our money, we can improve our financial situation. Many young people have convinced themselves that they are in a poor position in life based on what someone else has done to them. They think there are systems out to destroy their lives. While there is some truth to that, it does not negate the fact that there are wise and strategic decisions we are capable of making in order to position ourselves for success. I wanted to take time in this sermon to encourage and teach our young people that we are not just helpless victims who have to spend the rest of our lives in debt or financial distress, but instead we can train our mind and change our habits to ensure that we live with the level of financial freedom that is available for us.

Sermon Number Five

The fifth sermon of the sermon series I preached was entitled "A Giving Father." I preached this sermon on Sunday morning, November 3, 2019. The scriptural reference was Luke 15:11-21. For the second week in a row I referenced the story about the prodigal son; however, this time I focused on the giving nature of the father instead of the wild spending of the son. I wanted to take the time and teach on the mindset and the benefits of giving. Many of our young people are taught to hoard and spend as opposed to save and give. I was attempting to challenge and hopefully change the mindset of our young people in order to encourage strong biblical principles to be applied to their lives.

In this text, we are informed of a story about a father two sons. This father has a very giving heart and gives to his son freely. He gives to his first son even though he does not know whether or not his son would waste his inheritance. That is neither the focus nor concern for the father. The father gives out of love and through his nature. It is in is

character to give. He does not want to withhold any good thing from his child. There are three men represented in this story. Each man shows a different level of maturity. The first man is the first son. This son is the most immature because he is primarily focused just on himself. He is selfish and has run away from home in order to splurge and gorge himself with wild living and wild spending. This is the lowest level of maturity because this son depicts a childlike mentality of only focusing on his self and his personal needs and desires.

The second man is the second son. The second son is not totally selfish; but he is not totally mature. He is not totally selfish because he shows the willingness and maturity to stay at home and help out in his father's house. However, he is not totally mature because he complains about what the first son, his brother, receives when he gets home as opposed to being grateful for what he has had.

Lastly there is the father. The father is the most mature of the three. He depicts the highest level of maturity because he is the one who provides for both of the sons. He also shows a great level of maturity because when the first son returns home, he welcomes him with open arms as opposed to vindictively trying to punish him for leaving or spending his inheritance. He also is willing to have a heart to heart conversation with the second son and gently remind him of all the blessings he had access to in a way to try to encourage his heart and keep his second son from becoming bitter and spiteful.

I highlight these characteristics in each of the sons in order to expose the benefits of a giver. A giver is someone who has reached a level of maturity and understanding and knows that it is better to give than to receive. In order to grow to that point of maturity you have to be willing to care about someone else's needs above your own. When we are

singularly focused on ourselves and our own wants and desires, we are still dealing with a level of immaturity. However, when we are obtaining wealth and finances with the intention of being able to not only provide and take care of ourselves but to take care and bless somebody else, that is when we are reaching the levels of spiritual maturity that God has intended. God wants for us to be the head and not the tail. We should grow to become the lender and not the borrower. This is all about of the maturation and sanctification process.

Sermon Number Six

The sixth and final sermon of the sermon series I preached was entitled "Magnetic Ministry." I preached this sermon on Sunday morning, November 10, 2019. The scriptural reference was Luke 15:1-2. This was an evangelistic sermon focused on how attractive our ministry as a whole, as well as an individual will be when they are mentally, emotionally, spiritually and even financially whole. In this sermon, I attempted to stress the fact that it is our duty as a child of God to become the best version of ourselves if we are going to attract people to Jesus. I wrestle with the idea that the reason many young people are not attracted to the churches are because many of our churches are not doing that well of themselves. Many of our churches struggle with the same issues that were raise throughout this sermon series. Many of our churches are facing debt, they are overspending, they do not have much savings, and they struggle with giving. Many churches are unable to give or to offer their local communities the kind of programming needed to attract young adults. If churches would position themselves to offer the kind of child care programming, housing, education and financial literacy programming that is

sorely needed in our communities that would therefore attract so many more people of all ages, but especially the young adult demographic, back to the church to join, participate and even serve.

In this text, Jesus is sitting down to teach, and he is surrounded by sinners and publicans. I focus strictly on these two verses because it shows that Jesus was able to attract people from all walks of life. Even sinners wanted to be around Jesus, and I argue that the main reason so many people were drawn to Jesus is because Jesus was a whole person inside and out. He was spiritually whole, financially whole, mentally whole and emotionally whole. The purpose of offering this financial sermon series is an attempt to address the whole aspect of a human being. The church should be able to edify the spirituality of a man. The church should also be able to address every other aspect of that man's life. Therefore, if the church is able to teach, encourage and uplift someone even in the area of their finances, and if the church can also provide programming to offer job opportunities or networking opportunities, then that ministry would be very magnetic. In this sermon, I suggest that Jesus had a magnetic ministry because Jesus is able to address every area and aspect in our lives.

After this sermon series, I wanted to incorporate some practical programming to give people the opportunity to respond to the word. I partnered with a financial planner at a local financial institution and he was willing to be present at the church and take people's information. He was offering an opportunity to give a free financial consultation and offer some financial planning advice. He offered a range of financial services such as debt consolidation, investment opportunities, personal and business checking account products as well as savings and money market accounts. He was even willing to discuss

the stocks and bonds. This sermon series was an attempt to address with practicality the financial areas of our lives. Then after addressing, educating and uplifting everyone in the areas of our finances people would have a chance to make practical adjustments and changes to their lives. Our prayer is that those changes would have such an impact on each young person's lives that they would be drawn to the ministry at St. Paul Baptist Church, just like those sinners were drawn to Jesus.

Summary of Learning

Pre-Surveys and Post-Surveys

I identified approximately twenty-five young adults in my church. I reached out to every person connected to the church within the Millennial age range. This was an internal evangelistic effort. We have many people who were born between the years 1980-2000 who have a family member who attends St. Paul Baptist Church even though they do not attend themselves. I made sure to reach out to them and invite them to attend this sermon series which was specifically designed for them. The ones who agreed were the subjects of this project. They ranged from ages eighteen to forty years old. I met with them and let them know about this project and what I was attempting to accomplish. I asked them to participate in pre and post-surveys. After I informed them about the timetable and the process of the sermon series, I identified five people within that group who were willing to participate in personal interviews after the series was completed. I also identified a group of ten people who would be willing to participate in a focus group

after the series was completed. Once I identified all of my participants and explained the process, I began with the pre surveys.

The week before the sermon series, on Sunday September 29, 2019, I met with my group of young adults and asked them to fill out the pre-surveys that I created for this sermon series. The goal of the pre-survey was to get a baseline understanding of how the young adults viewed a range of topics regarding attending church. The pre-survey was broken down into three sections. The first section focused primarily on their views of the church and church attendance. The second section was focused on their views on preaching and how preaching impacts their life at all. The last section focused on the topic of finances. After everyone filled out the pre-surveys they were then asked to participate and listen to each and every one of my sermons. After the six weeks of sermons they would be asked to fill out the post-surveys. These post surveys had the same exact questions as the pre-surveys. My goal was to measure if there were any change in responses and attitudes.

Pre and Post-Survey Results

The first question under the category of church attendance measured how often does one attend church. In the pre-survey five people answered more than once per week, seven people answered bi-weekly, two people answered monthly and one person answered other. However, in the post-survey the attendance levels went up slightly. Six people answered more than once per week, eight people answered bi-weekly, and one person answered monthly. The second question measured how important church attendance was in comparison to their personal relationship with God. In the pre-survey

three people answered very important, eleven people answered somewhat important and one person answered not that important. Once again, in the post survey those level of importance increased slightly. One person answered most important, five people answered very important, and nine people answered somewhat important. The third question measured their thoughts on the level of importance in church attendance in relation to someone gain salvation. In the pre-survey three people answered very important, and twelve people answered somewhat important. Again, in the post-survey the levels of importance went up slightly across the board. Three people answered most important, five people answered very important and seven people answered somewhat important. Lastly, in the section based on church attendance. The fourth question measured their thoughts on how church attendance effected their quality of life. In the pre-survey two people answered very important, ten people answered somewhat important, and three people answered not that important. Again, in the post survey the answered changed slightly as four people answered most important, four people answered very important, and seven people answered somewhat important. Overall, there was a positive change in attitude based on the pre-surveys and post-survey in regard to how important attending church is to them after listening to six-week sermon series.

Moving on to the next section of the pre and post-surveys. This section focused on their attitudes in regard to preaching. The first question measured, on a scale of one through ten (one being least impactful and ten being most impactful), their attitudes regarding how much the preached word influences their personal lives. In the pre-survey the average response for all fifteen answers came to seven point four. However, after listening to the six-sermon in the series, the post survey revealed that the average answer

went up to eight point nine. The second questioned measured their attitudes regarding how important they believed preaching was to the overall church experience. The pre-survey revealed an average answer of nine point three and the post-survey revealed and average answer of nine point sixty-seven. The third question in this section asked them to rank (out of five options) what was the most important job of the church? In the pre-survey the average answer preaching was three. In the post survey the average answer to the importance of preaching went up to one. The fourth question measured their attitude regarding what topics should be preached about in the church. Once again, they were given five options to rank with one being the most important and five being the least important. In the pre-survey, the average answer for finances was four out of five. However, in the post-survey the average answer for finances went up to two out of five (Tied for two with family and behind the number one answer, salvation/heaven). Lastly, in this section, this question measured the attitude of the most important thing they want to learn about through the preached word. Once again, they were given five options to rank with one being the most important and five being the least important. The financial stability option was the answer I wanted to measure from this question. In the pre-survey the financial stability average answer was four. In the post survey the average answer stayed the same.

In the last section of the pre and post-surveys I asked ten true or false questions, specifically related to their attitudes regarding their own personal financial well-being. In the pre-survey each question was answered as true. In the post-survey each question was answered as true. There was not much of a change in attitude in their own personal

financial condition after listening to the six-sermons. Everything in this particular section remained constant.

Interviews

I selected five people who participated in the pre and post-surveys to answer questions on a one-on-one, interview style forum. In the beginning of each interview and focus group, I made sure to identify the definition of some of the main criteria that we were measuring. I made sure we reviewed their understanding and interpretation of concepts such as abandonment, millennials, evangelism and even the different types of suffering. I asked each person open-ended questions to elaborate on how each particular sermon impacted them. I wanted to give them the ability to elaborate on their feelings and their attitudes on finances as a whole. I conducted each of these interviews on Tuesday November 12, 2019. I interviewed each person on the same day. Each interview lasted for roughly around thirty to forty minutes.

The first young adult is a member of our music ministry. This person mentioned that overall this sermon series has really been a blessing for him. The one sermon that really stood out of him was "The Giving Father." He spoke about how this sermon challenged him to grow spiritually to the point where he thinks as a giver and not just a taker. He mentioned that he looked at church as a place where he could come in and get paid and leave, however he really did not have a connection. However, this sermon series challenged him to come for six weeks in a row; and he realized that church is not just a place where he can receive a blessing, but church is a place where he can serve, give and become a blessing for someone else. He even felt challenged to begin tithing and giving

back a portion of what the church was paying him. That led him to officially join the church and become more invested personally and spiritually. He now refers to St. Paul as "his" church.

The second person I interviewed is a young single parent who identified the most with the final sermon I preached, "Magnetic Ministry." This person talked about how they would come to church more if the church had more programming for their kids. "I come to church now because I grew up in this church. My parents and grandparents attend this church. However, once I had my kids it became more important for me to come to church. I try to make it as much as I can, but I find myself coming more so to make sure my kids are grounded in church. The more programming the church has for the kids, the more I would attend." In the sermon, Magnetic Ministry, I speak about how a church can be more attractive if they follow the financial principles that I preached for individuals to follow. Churches as an organization need to follow these same principles. Churches who are out of debt, and in a position to offer more after school and community programs will be magnetic for young people and this interview is a prime example of that.

The third person I interviewed is a not so regular church attender. This person has a lot of questions regarding faith and Christianity. This person spent a lot of time questioning the Bible and theology as a whole. They mentioned they come to church because their parents made them, but they do not come regularly. However, this person works in the banking industry; and therefore, this sermon series spoke to them. The practical teaching encouraged this person to want to get involved in any financial literacy programming the church may do. They also made the connection with the financial

planner who came to the church to offer a free consultation to any one of our members. "This series has been a real eye opener and it made me want to come back for more. As long as this church is reaching out to the community and offering helpful services, I want to be a part of it."

The fourth person I interviewed joined the church after the former church she attended dissolved. They were a fairly new church plant that eventually had to close their doors. She was looking for a church home and was attracted to the fact that St. Paul has been organized and established for 119 years. She also felt connected to the black history and tradition we embraced as a congregation. Her previous church was a multi-cultural church who did not address the social issues that were happening in the African American community. The preached word attracted her to join this church because she would hear a theological acknowledgement towards the civil unrest that has been happening in our community all around the country. In regard to the financial sermon series, this was another example of why she felt connected to this church and has become a regular attender. She was in between jobs and has been struggling financially, however they appreciated that their financial life was addressed and preached about in the sermon. Not only could they find emotional and spiritual comfort during the midst of a challenging season, but they also were able to apply some practical principles to help them get through that season as well. This person was proud to identify as a regular attender after this series completed.

The fifth and final person I interviewed was a young lady who recently joined the church a little over a year ago. She left the catholic church and was looking for an African American worship experience. Soon after attending this church this person got

involved with the young adult ministry. This sermon series spoke to this person because it dealt with practical teaching. The sermon was mixed with history, politics, social issues, theology and finances all mixed into one. The word was a huge draw and it encouraged them to want to get more involved and help out in launching some practical community programming.

Focus Group

On Tuesday November 12, 2019, I led a focus group to conclude this project. I gathered together ten young adults to discuss their reaction to the sermon series that I preached over the past six weeks. These ten young adults were a part of the same young adults who participated in the pre and post-surveys. However, no one who participated in this focus group were among the young adults who I did one on one interviews with. In this focus group I started off by asking some generic open-ended questions. I started by asking an open-ended question about their general reaction of the sermon series. After a few quiet moments, one of the young adults stepped up and shared their overall experience. This is what they shared:

> Pastor, I listened to each of your sermons and it felt like you were talking directly to me. I was consumed with debt. I had an excellent credit score. Paid my bills on time every month but lived like a pauper after the bills were paid. I had a Home equity loan, 18 credit cards nearing maximum limits and numerous small credit accounts. After listening to you I came home. Cut up all my credit cards, hired an attorney to help me work out a repayment plan with the companies and started adding money to my savings account. I prayed and ask God to assist me with wants and needs and with His help my life is now wonderful. Last year I wanted to give the church $117.00 for the church anniversary. I knew I didn't have extra but while showering one morning and I talked it over with God. Later I went to the mailbox and a letter from my car insurance company said they were changing how they bill. Instead of billing a month ahead they were going to billing for the current month. The letter said I didn't owe the $117.00 payment for that month. God is so good. I'm a witness he answers prayer.

I certainly appreciated the feedback and this person's willingness to step up and make the first comment. We went through and spoke about each sermon. There were many more observations and testimonies. The general consensus was that each person was appreciative of the focused sermon series. They also appreciated the topic as everyone thinks about money continually. They all agreed that this type of sermon series draws them to the church and motivates them to come more often because they feel like they are being fed. They also maintained that this series also encourages them to continue to come to church and get more involved in serving in ministry.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the research in this project has concluded that the sermon series on finances has altered the attitude of young adults towards attending church. Preaching as a form of communication had a positive effect on the young adults. They have listened and responded to the preaching. They are open and willing to attend church more frequently because they believe that the focus of the service was geared towards their needs. Based on the interviews, the focus groups and the post-surveys, there has been a consistent and clear trend towards young people becoming willing to be more engaged in organized religion. For so long our young people were disengaged mainly because they did not feel included or welcomed. Stories came out during the focus group such as not being able to be a part of the sound team, or the video team or the music ministry. Many young people at St. Paul did not want to attend church because they felt left out. However, this sermon series spoke to their needs specifically and ignited hope that this was a safe place where they could attend and have their needs met, voice heard and their spirituality could grow.

In this project, I wanted to test the hypothesis that determined whether or not young adults would be more likely to adjust their attitude and be more open to attending and participating in church based on their immediate needs being addressed. There has been a very obvious omission of young adults in the church and the need to evangelize that demographic is immense. Preaching this series was aimed at evangelizing to this young adult demographic through focusing on presenting practical sermons. I wanted to avoid colloquialisms and popular sayings that do not offer pragmatic solutions to current and real challenges that young adults face every day. Through this sermon series, I narrowed my focus closer to the specific needs and issues that are unique to the Millennial generation. Therefore, in this particular context the results have been clear. The young adults felt heard, included and cared about. They felt like the sermons were relevant and necessary.

As a whole, they were encouraged and moved to have a different outlook on church. No longer did they view the church as out of touch and useless. They now understand that the church can add true value to their everyday lives. Not just in the programming that may be able to be provided for their children, but they can receive a word that speaks to their personal lives. They can look forward to hearing a word that will encourage and motivate and teach them practical principles that will enhance their lives immediately. Lastly, they can hear a word that will allow them to respond in a practical way and give them an opportunity to serve in a meaningful way. So, not only will they be able to benefit from attending church and hearing a practical preached word, but they have an opportunity to serve and enjoy the satisfaction of knowing that they are in position to help somebody else.

Personal Growth

I am extremely grateful for being able to conduct this project because it has grown me exponentially both personally and spiritually. I have had to rely on the Lord's guidance and strength to help me to do this research and complete this project. These past three years of my life have been very challenging; however, I have learned that through Christ I can do all things. It has certainly been a challenging journey but through it all I have learned to trust in the Lord.

I have also been able to become self-reflective during this process. I have learned how important it is to become a better steward of my personal finances. I also learned the importance of aligning every other aspect of my personal life in godly order because my personal life has a direct effect on my ability to lead. I have been able to study and research topics of personal importance to me, which is the reason I believe I had the passion to complete this project. This project has blessed me personally as a Millennial which is why I believe it had so much of an impact on the Millennials in this church. With that being said, below are some of the conclusions that I reached with completing this project. I believe Millennials will come back to the institution of church if various tasks are accomplished. For example, Millennials will return if pastors and leaders are truthful and transparent about their personal journey; if the preaching is focused on practical and relevant topics; if a connection is made between marrying spiritual and biblical principles with practical solutions to address real life problems; if they feel as if they can grow spiritual, financially, mentally and emotionally; and if they have an

opportunity to serve in an area of ministry that is important to them and that serves the community in a practical way.

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